

IVEA NEWS

Representing Vocational Education Committees

(Irish Vocational Education Association – An Cumann Gairmoideachais in Éirinn)

ISSUE: JUNE 2009

McCann House,
99 Marlborough Road,
Donnybrook,
Dublin 4.

Tel: (01) 4966033
Fax.: (01) 4966460
Email: info@ivea.ie
Website: www.ivea.ie



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New DVD highlights the role of “VECs at the heart of the local community”

VOCATIONAL Education Committees lead, deliver and administer education and training programmes at local and community level across the country. The strength of Ireland's 33 VECs lies in their deep-rooted identity with local communities, making a real difference to the lives of people that VECs serve everyday.

With challenging economic times and shifting international markets, the demand for upskilling, reskilling, retraining, educational progression and adaptability within our nation's workforce has never been more needed. With all challenges, come responsibility and opportunities. As education and training service providers, VECs are best placed to respond to the changing educational, training and work-life needs of all kinds of people in local communities. IVEA, with the co-operation of Dun Laoghaire VEC, has developed a DVD which highlights the reality of what VECs mean to the lives of a variety of learners/clients.

VECs have both piloted and been involved in the provision of education and training programmes which respond directly to local community needs and which enhance the educational development, employability and future career prospects of the wide range of learners of all ages. Such deeply rooted, 'hands-on' local responsiveness continues to be the hallmark of the vocational education sector; looking outward nationally and internationally whilst servicing education and training locally and individually.

Copies of the DVD are issuing to VECs and our education partners but are also available from IVEA head office by contacting info@ivea.ie or telephoning 01 4966033.

IVEA acknowledges the support of Ms Carol Hanney CEO and Ms Laura Fryday, Dun Laoghaire VEC and Counties Wicklow, Clare and Cork as contributors in the production of this DVD.



Education resources cut

THE advances in investment in education achieved over the past two decades have been reversed in a few short months as the country grapples with an unprecedented collapse in public finances. This reversal of fortune has been so severe that the education sector has suffered previously unimaginable cutbacks in staffing and funding resources with more likely to come later in the year.

A generation's chance for a well rounded and good education has been put in peril by the rampant excesses of a few whose actions have condemned the current taxpayer and a future generation to suffer a severe fall in living standards. Where once taxpayers' money went towards social services, education and health, it must now pay to support a banking system brought to the brink of bankruptcy. Direct and indirect taxes have increased and investment in education is being cut. The focus of the State is on the bail-out of the banking system and our education system suffers as a result.

A lesson on the social effects of avarice and greed will remain with us for a generation.

The recent cuts in grants and resources to schools followed by the moratorium on certain appointments and recruitment will severely impact on schools and schooling. An increasingly complex operational environment means that schools which were already under pressure could become impossible to administer, especially if further cuts are in the pipeline.

From the student's perspective, it could well be the survival of the fittest as the cutback in school grants will disproportionately affect the weaker or disadvantaged pupil in non-Deis schools. The abolition of grants for books, Transition Year and Leaving Certificate Applied will hit those most in need of support.

In time however, the moratorium on recruitment and appointment will certainly erode management's capacity at both

VEC administrative and school level. Key functions will remain unfilled and the schools capacity to function could unravel.

IVEA will campaign to highlight the governance difficulties that are arising as essential staffing functions become vacant. Already IVEA has held a series of bilateral meetings with the Department of Education and Science to highlight the looming crisis but also to review how best the situation can be managed.

In an era of vastly diminished resources, there is a need to focus those scarce resources, with education and training sectors prioritised. Investment in education and training has been the key to lifting the country out of previous recessions and this should be our way forward.

Minister O'Keeffe has strived to limit the damage but it is unfortunate that his watch coincides with the worst recession since the 1930's. He and all of us must be concerned that there is no long term damage.

City of Cork VEC sets the standard Presentation of Excellence Through People Standard

STAFF in City of Cork VEC central administration unit succeeded in setting a new standard for Vocational Education Committees by being the first VEC in Ireland to be awarded the FAS Excellence Through People Standard. The award is Ireland's national standard for Human Resource Management; a quality accreditation that is uniquely dedicated to people. The Standard is an acknowledgement of the motivation, competence and dedication of administration staff to delivering quality service to clients as well the VEC's commitment to the development of its staff.

The award was presented to the Chairman of the Committee, Cllr Jim Corr and the Chief Executive Officer, Mr Ted



Ms Martina Burke, Assistant Manager, FAS Services to Business presents the award to Cllr Jim Corr (Chairperson, City of Cork VEC). Also pictured are Mr Ted Owens CEO and Ms Suzanne Mullins, HR Manager, City of Cork VEC

Owens by Ms Martina Burke, Assistant Manager, FAS Services to Business, at a ceremony held in the offices in Lavitts Quay on the 27 February 2008. Cllr Corr is quoted as saying that "This award is a great achievement for both staff and the VEC. I am very proud to accept this award on behalf of the staff". This sentiment was

echoed by the CEO Mr Ted Owens when he said "I am very proud of the staff for their achievement and their dedication to the ethos of the VEC, particularly for leading the way in terms of setting a new standard for the VEC sector".

The award is valid for two years.

VECs – The Key to Unlocking Prosperity for Local Communities

VOCATIONAL Education Committees have evolved over almost eight decades into the complex, community-connected organisations that we know today. Established in 1930, at the height of the Great Depression, they have served local communities through several periods of difficulty over the course of those eighty years. Indeed, it could well be said the late lamented days of the Celtic Tiger were very much an aberration and that notwithstanding the many achievements during the ‘good years’, VECs have particularly come into their own at times of national crisis.

Today, VECs are, for a variety of reasons, probably better placed than any other education provider to respond to the upskilling needs of the workforce; those employed and unemployed. VECs have a presence in literally every community in Ireland through their schools, centres of education and county/city offices.

VECs have demonstrated expertise in the provision of quality assured training and education to adults, from levels 1 to 6 of the National Framework of Qualifications, across a wide range of disciplines.

In their 247 second level schools, VECs provide specialist teaching facilities – Woodwork and Building Construction, Metalwork, Engineering, Technical Drawing, Computer Aided Design, Business and Computing, Science and Technology, Cookery, Art and Design, etc. These specialist facilities could be used, outside of those times when they are being used to deliver second level education, to deliver upskilling programmes. Indeed, there is hardly a subject area that VECs do not have the capacity to provide training in – between levels 1 and 6.

In addition to providing second level education to nearly 100,000 students, VECs deliver some form of education/training to more than 200,000 adults annually – a significant proportion of this targeting those with low basic skills/qualifications and those seeking a second

educational chance. These further education/training programmes are delivered in VEC schools and colleges, centres of education, workplaces and in a variety of community settings. Most of this education/training is provided over levels 1 – 6 of the NFQ – catering to learners whose needs span from those experiencing literacy difficulties to those progressing to third level education.

VECs provide a local, ‘one stop shop’ for young and old seeking to improve their skills/qualifications. The moment an adult makes an enquiry at a VEC office, school or centre, s/he is potentially stepping on to an education/training elevator capable of taking him/her from where s/he is, to where s/he wants to be without as it were, leaving the building! Each VEC offers a full suite of education/training programmes from NFQ levels 1 to 6 that the adult can climb at his/her own pace – selecting, as s/he climbs, the courses and modules most relevant to his/her personal aspirations – irrespective of whether those aspirations are work, family or community related.

Recognising that many who feel the need to improve their qualifications and life prospects are unsure of how best to go about it, indeed recognising that many taking the first tentative steps towards upskilling may not have had great experiences of the education system previously; VECs provide an Adult Education Guidance Service to assist them. The Guidance Service assists those making enquiries about upskilling to make an assessment of their existing skills – irrespective of whether those skills were acquired through formal education or through practical experience. Then the service helps the prospective learner to work out what further skills s/he needs and most importantly, where to locate the courses to counteract their skills gap.

Understandably, many still believe that qualifications may only be acquired through participation in formal courses of study and not unnaturally, the thought of having to start at the bottom of the

education/training ladder often deters adults from even beginning the climb. However, VECs, as Further Education and Training Council (FETAC) accredited providers, may recognise prior learning – irrespective of whether this learning occurred in an educational institution, in the workplace, in the community or in the family. Consequently, learners may be able to commence their studies further up the qualifications ladder than their formal qualifications might, at first suggest. For example, a person with a Junior Certificate (level 3 qualification) approaching a VEC seeking to upskill, may be able to avail of ‘on the job’ learning recognised for the purpose of gaining admission to a course at level 6 – though s/he has no formal qualifications at levels 4 or 5.

VECs have a level of community-connectedness second to none, given the composition of their Committees and boards of management – a composition that comprises Local Authority representatives; representatives of those who work in VECs at every level; representatives of the parents of students attending VEC schools; and persons who reflect the interests of students; trustees of community colleges managed by a VEC; local voluntary organisations and the wider world of work – trades, professions and business generally. Putting it another way, VECs are able to serve their communities well because in a very real sense, they are of their communities. For example, during the long drawn out recession of the 80’s, VECs built a Further Education sector (Post Leaving Certificate – PLC), literally out of nothing, to cater to the skills needs of industry and commerce and the employment needs of many who might otherwise have been left on the unemployment scrapheap. In building this Further Education sector, VECs did not just slavishly offer the same courses in each VEC. Instead, each VEC put in place a suite of courses to cater specifically to the needs of its own geographical area. Indeed, these courses, in many instances were tailor-made to respond to needs of particular localities within the VEC’s remit

– courses relating to sailing on the South coast and courses on aquaculture on the West coast, for example.

More recently, we had another significant example of the capacity of VECs to adapt to the ever changing needs of Irish society when, just last September, County Dublin VEC assumed the patronage of two new community primary schools in West Dublin – a development that has the potential to change very significantly the way primary education is managed in modern Ireland.

Over the years of the Celtic Tiger, it must have seemed that Ireland had finally come of age and that we and our sons and daughters could look forward to endless years of prosperity. Of course, we would have to work hard but hard work is second nature to the Irish. The benefit for Irish society this time around was that we could put in the hard work at home rather than in Boston, Birmingham or Brisbane and so fully savour all that living in this idyllic Island of ours has to offer.

Now, virtually without warning, Ireland finds itself in a recession, the likes of which we, not unreasonably, believed would never be seen again. Young people are leaving school and college with little prospect of employment and hundreds of young and old are being shed from the workforce by the day. Also, while in previous economic downturns, there were opportunities abroad, the international economic climate and labour market is facing similar problems to Ireland. All economies have caught the same infection! Ireland today, is faced with a social and economic problem that it must take responsibility for addressing; no safety valves are available to siphon off the pressure – as was available during previous recessions.

We may not know when or how the world economy will turn upwards again but we can be absolutely certain that when the green shoots of economic growth break through again, our workforce must be better skilled than it currently is. We know that skills are the turbines that drive economies and that the turbines must be ready to roll when the economic jet is ready for take-off. We also know, instinctively, that Irish society cannot afford to consign its young people to nothing but the dole queue.

We simply have to find a way of resourcing education and training programmes that will both enhance the skills of the workforce (thus attracting overseas firms to locate here and enabling Irish men and women to take advantage of the job opportunities that this investment will generate) and providing possibilities and fulfilment for our young people in particular. To do otherwise, would be to cast a generation of young people adrift in an ocean of hopelessness – and that is simply an unimaginable prospect.

The April 2007 *Report of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (Ireland's National Skills Strategy)* made it very clear, well in advance of the current financial crisis commencing, that if Ireland wished to avoid serious future economic dislocation, it would have to upskill some half a million of its existing workforce by one or two steps on the 10-step NFQ qualifications ladder – with a particular focus on those occupying the bottom half of the ladder. *The National Skills Strategy* set the following upskilling targets for the Irish workforce by 2020.

- **70,000 workers to upskill from levels 1 & 2 to level 3**
- **9,000 workers to upskill from levels 1/2 to levels 4/5**
- **250,000 workers to upskill from level 3 to levels 4/5**
- **1,000 workers to upskill from level 3 to levels 8/9/10**
- **140,000 workers to upskill from levels 4/5 to levels 6/7**
- **30,000 workers to upskill from levels 4/5 to levels 8/9/10**
- **4,000 workers to upskill from levels 6/7 to levels 8/9/10**

Most of the work entailed in achieving these targets lies within the remit and competence of the VEC sector. If this work was deemed to be important when the economy at home and abroad was thriving, it is of far greater importance now. In effect, many of the changes in the Irish economy, that the Expert Skills Group assumed would occur incrementally between 2007 and 2020, have been telescoped into a period of some eighteen months. The jobs that have been lost in low skills areas will not be replaced by jobs requiring similar skills. Rather, in time, they will be replaced by jobs that require higher skills. We must now prepare our workforce for those jobs or lose those job opportunities forever.

The National Skills Strategy assumed that most of upskilling required to achieve the 2020 skills targets would involve the training of full-time workers on a part-time basis, but the downturn has meant that many who require upskilling may well now be more available for training than was previously anticipated. The overall magnitude of the upskilling task is still pretty much as was anticipated but rather than being spread over some dozen years, it may now be possible to frontload it so that the workforce is upskilled earlier than was originally anticipated.

VECs are ready and able to meet the challenge of upskilling the workforce in preparation for the economic upturn that will inevitably materialise.

The problem is how to resource this upskilling – in view of the extent to which the State's tax take is inexorably contracting. Yet, somehow or other, Ireland must find the means to upskill its workforce – especially its younger less qualified members, otherwise it is at risk of undoing the hard won progress that the country has made over the course of a generation.

The great challenge facing the whole IVEA family is to mobilise the resources to facilitate VECs doing what they have the significantly the workforce and in the process, both to prepare the economic turbines for takeoff and to provide hope and fulfilment for thousands of Irish men and women, especially young people with relatively low skills/qualifications.

Implementing Equality Impact Assessments in VECs: Successful Pilot concluded in Co. Donegal VEC

2007 was designated the *European Year of Equal Opportunities for All* by the EU Council and the European Parliament and IVEA and the Equality Authority worked on a joint project to develop 'Guidelines for Conducting Equality Impact Assessments on VEC Plans, Policies and Programmes' at key moments in their design and development¹. Following a competitive tender, Co. Donegal VEC was charged with the responsibility of piloting the Guidelines at local level.

In October 2008, Co Donegal VEC's Adult Education Service undertook the pilot project (with the Equality Authority) to implement an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) of its programmes and services, one of the first to be conducted by any VEC in the country. The Service's 2005-2009 Strategic Plan² was nearing completion and it was about to embark on the development of its next strategic plan, it was an opportune moment to implement an EqIA. The main purpose of this EqIA was to help ensure that the Adult Education Service Review and Action Plan took account of these needs and essentially involved 'placing equality at the centre of decision making.'³ As laid out in the IVEA/Equality Authority Guidelines, a number of steps were involved:

- Employment of an Equality Adviser to **gather data and relevant information** on the groups across the nine grounds particular to Co Donegal;
- Analysis of the data to **assess the potential impact** of the plan on any of the groups;
- **Formal consultation of representatives** of these groups to seek and explore their views on the data gathered, the impact assessment and any changes required to the plan based on the impact assessment;
- **Deciding on required changes** (if any) to the plan based on these consultations to enhance the impact of the plan on these groups.

A further step, **monitoring the implementation** of the plan to check its impact on these groups, will be required once the implementation of the plan begins.

This process enabled the Adult Education Service to not only 'equality proof' its strategic plan but to also influence the planning discourse among staff across the various programmes and support services and provided a model for other organisations who are keen to progress the equality agenda. It has also provided the Service with detailed equality information on the county and enabled it to meet with representatives of each of the nine grounds, assisting in the development of new working relationships and reinforcing existing partnerships.

A danger exists that in the current economic climate that the promotion of equality will be given lesser importance than heretofore however, carrying out an Equality Impact Assessment within an organisation or service is a relatively inexpensive and effective method of ensuring that equality issues are kept to the forefront.

¹ Irish Vocational Education Association/The Equality Authority. *Guidelines for Conducting Equality Impact Assessments on IVEA and VEC Plans, Policies and Programmes*. Dublin: IVEA/The Equality Authority, 2007, p.5

² County Donegal Vocational Education Committee. *Adult Education Service Strategic Plan 2005-2009*. Letterkenny: Co Donegal VEC, 2005

³ Ibid.

Co. Wicklow VEC Project on Building and Maintaining the Positive Work Environment

The foundation stone of our organisation is our people. It is crucial that a work environment exists where people enjoy what they do, feel that they are making a contribution, are valued, have a purpose, enjoy positive work relationships and feel they can reach their potential. Co. Wicklow VEC introduced a project in 2008 called 'Building and Maintaining the Positive Work Environment'. This project is linked to key training and developmental objectives in Co. Wicklow VEC's Education Plan. The project is being rolled out in several phases and is still ongoing.

The first phase of the project concentrated on training staff from the Scheme in mediation and facilitation skills. The programme was based on the nationally agreed training for Designated Resolution Facilitators (DRF). In total 21 people were trained in these valuable skills. Further to that, 16 of the trainees were formally appointed as Designated Resolution Facilitators to the Scheme under the *Codes of Practice for Dealing with Complaints of Bullying and Harassment in VEC Workplaces*. This training will be followed up in the next academic year to ensure that the skill level is retained and enhanced.

In October and November 2008, phase two of the project concentrated on skills training mainly for Senior Managers, Principals and Coordinators. This type of training is unique and was specifically researched, designed and delivered by expert consultants for Co. Wicklow VEC. The training focused on key skills development and the role of the manager in building and maintaining a positive work environment. The training was highly commended by participants and will be followed up with another day of more intensive skills training in the 2009 school year.

Co. Wicklow VEC is currently researching and making proposals for phase three of the project and identifying key priority areas to be addressed. IVEA wishes Co. Wicklow VEC every continued success with the implementation of this project.

St. Ailbe's School, Co. Tipperary S.R. VEC takes honours at the BT Young Scientist Exhibition

In January, nine students from St. Ailbe's School in Tipperary Town travelled to the RDS in Dublin to compete in the 2009 BT Young Scientist Exhibition. The students were carrying on a proud tradition of successful participation by the school in this prestigious event. For each of the last five years St. Ailbe's has submitted projects to the Exhibition.

- Kevin McNerney, Dereck Withero and Stephen Withero (third year students) presented a project entitled "A Colorimetric Determination of the kinetics of Sulphur precipitation". The project involved using data logging software and a colorimeter to quantitatively determine the rate law for the reaction between sodium thiosulphate and hydrochloric. Their efforts paid off when they received a highly commended award from this year's judges.
- Jodie Bullivant, Etain Ryan and Kieran Flynn (also third year students) presented a project on "Bulls & Bears – Timing the Stock market". They compared three different ways of investing €60,000 in the stock market and discovered that using 30 and 50 week moving averages to generate buy and sell signals was the method which gave the greatest return and provided great security against recent falls in valuations.
- Neasa O'Connor, Lyndsey Hughes and Joanna Regan (fifth year students), did a project called "Financial Awareness among sixth year students in South Tipperary". They felt that in view of the current economic climate it would be interesting to establish how knowledgeable sixth year students were regarding bank accounts, cost of living, the credit crunch etc.



Some of the St. Ailbe's group who participated at the BT Young Scientist Exhibition 2009 (l-r): Dereck Withero, Kevin McNerney, Stephen Withero, Kieran O'Dwyer (teacher), Jodie Bullivant, Etain Ryan and Kieran Flynn

Mr Kieran O'Dwyer, a teacher at St. Ailbe's who co-ordinates the BT Young Scientist entries from the school received a prestigious award for his work encouraging participation in extra-curricular Science activities in the school. He was presented with the Intel Educator of Excellence award by Leonard Hobbs, CEO of Intel Ireland. Kieran received this honour for the quality and consistency of the projects presented

by St. Ailbe's students at the exhibition over the last five years. He was interviewed for the prize after being short listed by the judges. The prize consists of a travel award which involves Kieran travelling to the Intel International Science and Education Forum to be held in Reno Nevada in May. He will travel as part of a team which will represent Ireland at the Educator's Academy section of the event.



Mr Kieran O'Dwyer (left) (St. Ailbe's School, Tipperary Town), being presented with the Intel Educator of Excellence Award by Leonard Hobbs (CEO Intel Ireland) at the 2009 BT Young Scientist Exhibition.

Kerry Education Service – JCPE – Physical Education Project

THE Kerry Education Service (KES) Physical Education (PE) Project 2007-2009 was established in September 2007, with the help of the Junior Cycle Physical Education Support Service (JCPESS) and the University of Limerick (UL) to achieve a number of goals: to fully implement the JCPE curriculum in all KES schools, to support the teachers in the process and to advocate for P.E. within the whole school community. KES P.E. teachers meet monthly in the Education Centre to share ideas, discuss common chal-

lenges and plan for the future. The teachers have participated in a number of inservices: Dance, Gymnastics, Adventure Activities, National Heart Foundation, Wiki and JCPE 'catch – up' inservices.



Díospóireacht Ghael Linn Comórtas an Phiarsaigh – Craobh na hÉireann 2009 – Sinsir

Bhuaigh Iarbhunscoil Mhá Nuad Craobh na hÉireann i gComórtas Díospóireachta Ghael Linn in Óstán an Longford Arms i mBaile Longfoirt ar an Déardaoin 26ú Márta, don dara bliain as a chéile. D'éirigh leo an ceann is fearr a fháil ar na foirne eile a bhí ag glacadh páirte – Pobalscoil Neasáin as Baile Dúill, Co. Átha Cliath, Coláiste Sancta Maria, Cluain Cearbháin, Co. Mhaigh Eo agus Meánscoil na nUrsulach, Dúrlas, Co. Thiobraid Árann.

An rún a bhí le plé ná – “Tá an ceart acu siúd atá i gcoinne an domhandú” agus bhí foireann Mhá Nuad ag moladh an rúin, rud a rinne siad go héifeachtach. B'iad baill na foirne seo ná Gillian Ní Chathmhaoil. Sinéad Ní Mhuirí agus Béibhinn Ní Chíosáin. Bhí Seán Mac Giobúin Uí Mhórdha mar ionadaí. Daltaí as an gcúigiú bliain sa scoil iad go léir. Bhí an fhoireann faoi stiúir Íde Ní Uallacháin,



múinteoir Gaeilge sa scoil. Ba í Evanne Ní Chuilinn, craoltóir spóirt le RTÉ a bhí mar aoichathaoirleach ar an gcomórtas agus mhol sí cainteoirí na bhfoirne go léir as feabhas na hargóna acu.

Mhol Príomhoide na scoile, An tUasal Johnny Nevin, an fhoireann agus dúirt sé go raibh gach duine sa scoil an-bhródúil as an éacht a bhí déanta ag na daltaí seo don dara bliain a chéile.



Pictured are Shane Kelly (award winning student) and Ms Eva Ní Chionnfhalaigh, Gaelcholáiste Luimnigh, City of Limerick VEC

City of Limerick VEC's Shane ...a leading problem-solver!

Second year student Shane Kelly, of Gaelcholáiste Luimnigh, City of Limerick VEC's All-Irish Secondary School, secured third place in Ireland (from a total number of 2,867 pupils nationwide) in University College Galway's Prism 2008 Maths Awards.

Co. Westmeath VEC's Tomás Mount, a high performer!



Pictured: Tomás Mount, Ardleigh, a student at Mullingar Community College, winner of the Most Promising Performer Award at the St Andrew's Drama Festival.

MULLINGAR Community College has a long history of involvement in theatre and for the past three years, their annual drama production has been entered in a drama festival run by St Andrew's College, Dublin. Last year the group won the adjudicator's overall award for their interpretation of the Silent Symphony in a play called 'The Musicians'. However, this year brought even more excitement when one of the cast of their current production called 'The Exam' was presented with the Most Promising Performer Award. Tomás Mount, a fifth year student at Mullingar Community College, was selected out of seventy other young participants to be the first recipient of the Fred Lee trophy to commemorate the 21st anniversary of the festival.

Co. Wicklow VEC involved in Anti-Bullying Survey

The experience of bullying, particularly at post-primary level, has been cited by many as having had a significant negative impact on their education and a factor which contributes to early school leaving within the county. In response, Wicklow County Development Board established a sub-committee to undertake an initiative in a Co. Wicklow context to raise awareness around the issue of bullying, specifically at post-primary level. The initiative is led by the following personnel on behalf of the Social Inclusion Measures Working Group of the County Development Board:

- Ms Mary Carney, Regional Office Manager, Department of Education and Science for Co Wicklow/Kildare.
- Ms Helen Howes, Development Worker, Wicklow Working Together.
- Mr Martin Phillips, Education Officer, Co. Wicklow VEC.

An "Anti-Bullying Awareness Week" was organised in November. A key activity of this week was each school's participation in the Co. Wicklow anti-bullying survey. The working group engaged the services of an ICT consultant, Mairead Melia who teaches in Abbey Community College to



(L to R) Ms Mairead Melia the IT Consultant and teacher in Abbey CC Wicklow who designed and administered the survey; Mr Martin Phillips Education Officer and Ms Mary Carney from the DES regional office for Kildare/Wicklow area.

manage the survey process. Mairead wrote the programme for the survey and supervised all aspects of its administration. Every second-level school in Co. Wicklow, except one participated. All of Co. Wicklow VEC's schools took part. In all, about 3,000 surveys were completed and the work of analysis begins immediately. The sub-committee hopes to have results before the end of this academic year. It is

planned that a report will be issued to each participating school in respect of their own school results on a strictly confidential basis. The purpose of this report is to assist each school in identifying the key issues within their own particular school. It is planned to produce and make publicly available an overall Co. Wicklow report, which will give aggregated results for the County.

'FOOL INJECTED': Co. Donegal VEC launches DVD on Road Safety



The DVD 'Fool Injected' was produced by the fourth year LCA class (2007-2008) with the guidance of Cyril Kelly of 'Soup Stone Productions', Omagh.

Some of the 4th year LCA class and their art teacher Mrs Molloy receiving a gift from the Road Safety Authority at a presentation in the Clanree Hotel, Letterkenny.



The National Council for Special Education (NCSE): Supporting Special Education

(Article from the NCSE)

The Work of the Council

Resource Allocation

THE National Council for Special Education (NCSE) has, through its Special Education Needs Organisers (SENOS) been interacting directly with schools for just over four years now. The SENOS consider applications from schools for additional teaching and Special Needs Assistants (SNA) resources to meet the needs of children with assessed special educational needs. The SENOS sanction resources in accordance with Department of Education and Science (DES) policy and they also assist in the transition of pupils from primary schools to second level schools through advance interaction with schools and parents.

Since the involvement of the NCSE in the allocation process the backlog of applications for resources has been eliminated, with applications now being normally dealt with within a 6 to 8 week timeframe. SENOS have also had a major role in identifying the need for special classes and negotiating with schools on the setting up of such classes.

Also, the NCSE is continuing to build better and more cohesive working relationships with the HSE with a view to providing a more co-ordinated approach to supporting

the health and educational needs of children with special educational needs.

While the allocation of resources to schools to support children with special educational needs is the function of the Council that is immediately visible to schools and parents, the Council has other important functions on which it is now making major progress. These are functions in relation to research, policy advice and dissemination of information on best practice in relation to special education.

Research

An intensive research programme was launched in 2008. The research in this programme will inform the preparation of policy advice on special education matters and information relating to best practice in educating children with special education needs (SEN). The Research Framework that governs this programme incorporates four key strands, each with a number of sub themes. These strands ensure that all research undertaken by the NCSE relates to: the experiences of children with SEN and their parents, best practice/policies in provision for children with SEN, staff and support issues and improved data collection in the area of special education.

Approximately 15 new research projects have been commissioned since 2008; some of which are nearing conclusion, others are approaching the mid-way stage, while many have only recently been commissioned. The research projects are very diverse including a number of international literature reviews on best educational models for children with particular SEN, empirical studies in the areas of transition at key educational milestones, curriculum application and experiences, parental attitudinal surveys, resource allocation and deployment and also a longitudinal study considering in detail SEN provision within Irish schools and associated experiences and outcomes for children with SEN. These reports will be made available on the NCSE's website as they become available.

Information and guidance

The NCSE has already published and distributed to schools comprehensive guidelines on the preparation of individual educational plans for children with special

educational needs. While there is no statutory requirement to provide individual education plans pending the implementation of the relevant section of the EPSEN Act, these guidelines provide guidance to teachers on best practice in this regard. The NCSE has also facilitated and funded the distribution to schools of the "Partners in Education" handbook, originally published by Offaly Centre for Independent Living Ltd with funding from the Department of Education and Science, as a resource for teachers when dealing with pupils with special needs in a mainstream setting.

2009/2010 Applications Process

Applications for support for children with SEN for the school year 2009/2010 are currently being processed. Schools have been advised to submit applications as soon as possible in order to facilitate the timely processing of applications. It is essential that applications are submitted without delay in order that decisions can be issued to schools in advance of the summer holidays. The arrival of large numbers of applications in late May make it impossible for the NCSE to process all applications before the end of the school year.

SNA Review

The NCSE has been specifically requested to carry out a review of all SNA allocations to ensure that current SNA allocations are in accordance with Departmental policy and that the allocations to each school are warranted by the care needs of the pupils for which they have been allocated. This review has been notified to schools by the DES and SENOS will be in direct contact with schools over the coming weeks to make arrangements for individual reviews. To the extent possible reviews will be co-ordinated with the 2009/2010 allocation process. The review will be carried out by reference to the normal SNA allocation criteria which have not changed. The review will commence at the end of April and will be completed as soon as possible.

Development of review and appeals procedures and other protocols

The ongoing allocation of resources to schools to enable them to meet the needs of children with special educational needs is a major function of the Council and critical to the successful inclusion of children with special educational needs in

all our schools. The implementation of this function in a fair, consistent and transparent manner is and will be a key objective of the Council. While the interaction between the schools and the NCSE has proved mutually satisfactory there have been issues in relation to particular interactions and decisions. There has been a demand for a review and appeals process for decisions which schools feel to be unjustified. There have also been requests for clarification in relation to the co-operation with the NCSE that is required of schools under Section 14 of the EPSSEN Act. Clarification in relation to the professional conduct that should govern interactions has also been sought. These issues are currently being addressed with the school management

bodies and other stakeholders with a view to publishing agreed guidelines in the near future.

Implementation of the EPSSEN Act 2004

One of the first tasks of the NCSE was the production and submission to the Minister for Education and Science of an Implementation Report setting out its views and recommendations on the actions and resources needed to implement the EPSSEN Act. The NCSE is naturally disappointed at the Government announcement that implementation of the Act is being deferred due to the current economic situation. However the critical issue is that resources to support children with special educational needs are maintained and that targeted in-service

continues to be available to teachers in the special education area. At the present time the NCSE is continuing to provide resources to support pupils with special educational needs as heretofore.

The Future

The NCSE will continue to allocate resources to support children with special educational needs and, through its research and information programmes and direct interaction with schools and parents, to promote best practice in the area of special education. In promoting best practice the NCSE will endeavour to ensure that continuous progress is made towards a situation which will facilitate the full implementation of the EPSSEN Act.

Co. Wexford VEC's Enniscorthy Vocational College makes sweet music!



Members of School Orchestra

"Music is the universal language of mankind"

IN 2003, the Co. Wexford Arts Council approached Enniscorthy Vocational College with a proposal to introduce subsidised string teaching in the school. Two professional string players were employed to teach violin, viola, cello and double bass in the school. Instruments were part-funded

by the Arts Council and by Co. Wexford VEC. Students are provided with free tuition and pay instrument rental at a nominal fee.

Today, these students form the school orchestra and a number have progressed

to play in the Co. Wexford Youth Orchestra and other local orchestras. Advanced students have played in the National Concert Hall with Youth Orchestra and three of the present students are travelling to Prague in April, to perform in an international festival for youth orchestras.

What VECs do!

It is easy to assume that everyone knows about the work of VECs but the reality is that many don't have a great understanding of the many different education, training and related services that VECs provide, quietly and efficiently in their local communities.

Second Level Schools

For many, the term VEC conjures up the idea of a local post-primary school, which is not entirely surprising, since VECs manage one third (247) of all second level schools in the country, catering to some 98,000 students and employing some 9,000 teachers and some 700 special needs assistants. What some may not recognise however is that VEC schools have been transformed over the years into some of the most successful schools in the country – in academic, sport and cultural terms.

For example, how many realise that a VEC school won both the Munster junior and senior schools' rugby cups last year or that VEC schools are regularly found in the ranks of those providing most students to universities and institutes of technology?

VECs – Further Education and Training

However, to see VECs solely in terms of schools would be to under-appreciate seriously their contribution to the evolution of modern Ireland.

In 2009, VECs has responsibility for administering, coordinating and leading a wide range of education, training and related services. Consequently, contrary to recent media stories, much of the work undertaken by staff attached to VEC offices is not of an administrative nature, though it may be loosely described as such for budgetary and other purposes in order to distinguish it from the work of teachers and tutors.

A significant proportion of a VEC's administrative office staff is involved in developing and leading education programmes for early-school-leavers and those availing of second-chance education in one form or another, many of whom fall into the hard-to-access category. For example, the work of Adult Education Organisers, Adult Literacy Officers, Youthreach Coordinators, Community Education Facilitators and Adult Education Guidance personnel involves very little administration. Rather, it involves recruiting learners, developing bespoke programmes to ensure that these learners are retained in the learning programmes, providing guidance and support to learners prior to, during and at the conclusion of their programmes, and

facilitating learner assessment, progression and transfer, etc.

Recent public references to the state monies expended on VEC administration salaries seriously misrepresent the actual situation, though, of course, VECs are funded to carry out work for schools that, in a non-VEC school, would be carried out and resourced either at school or Department of Education level.

Currently VECs deliver some form of education/training to more than 200,000 adults annually – much of this targeting disadvantage, those with low basic skills/qualifications and those seeking a second educational chance. Interestingly, the total number of full and part time (graduate and postgraduate) students in all third level colleges, for 2007/2008 was 170,305. In this context, the 200,000 adult learners that VECs reach, in the course of a year, seems might impressive, indeed. Yet, much of this education and training goes unnoticed for the very simple reason that it is delivered, without fanfare, at a local level – where people live and work.

While some VECs offer full degree courses as part of their evening class programme, the principal VEC focus is on providing education/training (upskilling) opportunities to those with less than level seven (7) NFQ qualifications. And much of this work addresses the education/training needs of many that our education system has failed or missed, for one reason or another.

Adult Education Guidance Initiative

Each VEC operates an adult educational guidance service to encourage/facilitate personal, educational and career development for participants in VEC programmes, thus enabling these learners to move towards their full potential - at work, in the family and in the community. In the course of 2007, this service provided guidance of one kind or another to some 39,363 adults.

Youth Work

The Youth Work Act of 2001 resulted in VECs being given a number of functions and responsibilities for youth work programmes and services within their scheme areas and VECs have appointed Youth Officers to assist them in meeting their new responsibilities. These officers work closely with the other services provided by

their VECs and with national and local youth organisations to ensure that the wider development needs of young people (particularly disadvantaged young people) in their areas are addressed in an integrated manner.

Administration of Student Support Schemes

Currently VECs administer some 55% (41,736 new applications and renewals in 2008/09) of all student support grant schemes for both Further and Higher education. Once the Student Support Bill is enacted, VECs will have sole responsibility for the administration of applications under the new unified support scheme. Critically, the involvement of VECs in the administration of the student support service ensures that, where local knowledge and accessibility is essential, as in the case of assisting applicants with the submission of their applications, such assistance is available.

The School Transport Scheme

The school transport scheme for both primary and post-primary education is administered through VEC offices and VEC CEOs act as the Transport Liaison Officers for the scheme. Currently the scheme carries about 135,000 students each school day – 75,000 in the post-primary sector, 60,000 in the primary sector and some 8,000 students with special needs.

This work requires close liaison between the CEO as Transport Liaison Officer and virtually every school in Ireland – 3,160 (primary) and 732 (post primary).

VEC Community National Schools

Last September, County Dublin VEC assumed responsibility for the patronage of two primary schools in West Dublin and, in the years to come, the community national school model is likely to play an increasing role at primary level – as Ireland seeks to expand primary school patronage to cater to the needs of ‘new’ Ireland.

Outdoor Education

A number of VECs operate and manage outdoor education centres, a vital element in the provision of a holistic education.

In addition to this structured activity, there is hardly a local attempt to improve the social, educational, economic or recreational life of a community that does not involve local VEC staff or members in one way or another.

While much of this involvement is initiated by the VEC, other bodies also seek out VEC involvement in the knowledge that the VEC, because of its involvement in so many other community bettering activities, has the capability, through either its reserved or executive arms, to pull in resources that will enhance the outcomes for whatever project is being considered.

Currently, VECs provide Further Education and training, at local level, in the following contexts:

- **Self-financing Adult Education:** part-time adult education classes mainly in the evenings covering the full range of human activity – some of 70,000 enrolments annually.
- **Post Leaving Certificate (PLC)** courses offering FETAC level 5 or 6 awards in a wide range of fields providing routes to both employment and third level education for both school leavers and adults (50%) returning to education – 31,000 plus learners annually.
- **Youthreach** which caters to the education needs of some 3,000 15 to 20 year old early school leavers.
- **Senior Traveller Training Centres (STTCs)**, originally established to provide basic education for travellers aged between 15 and 25 but now mainly provide for mainly older female travellers – some 1,100 participants annually.
- **The Back to Education Initiative (BTEI)** provides part-time education for over 16s with less than upper second level education who need to combine learning with family and work commitments work caters to some 25,000 annually.
- **Adult Literacy Schemes** are the main source of adult basic education (ABE) in Ireland. 39,514 adults availed of this service in 2006 – some 12,000 registering for ESOL support. Service involves some 5,500 trained tutors – 1,300 of these are paid and the rest are volunteers.
- **Prisoner Education** involves a partnership between the Irish Prison Service and the VECs. VECs employed 210 whole-time teacher equivalents in the provision of education to 1,609 prisoners in 2005/06.
- **Vocational Training Opportunities (VTOS) Scheme** provides full-time courses of up to two years duration for some 5,500 adults unemployed for at least six months.
- **Community Education** facilitates facilitate communities or groups that feel the need for education and/or training by providing them (30,000+ in 2006) with the courses/programmes they desire in schools, community centres and even in private houses.
- The FAS **Skills for Work (SFW)** initiative involves VECs providing training to some 1,600 workers with low levels of literacy and numeracy – usually delivered in the workplace.
- **SkillVEC programme** delivers workplace education/training to HSE) staff on a country-wide basis at FETAC Levels 5 and 6. This programme is relevant to about 28,000 members of staff across the country.
- **VECs** also provide literacy tuition the outdoor staff, at general operative level, in Local Authorities.



(l-r): Mr Seamus Morris, MIT, Mr Dave Maddy, Dell, Mr Seamus Ryan, Education Officer, County Meath VEC (Organiser), Dr Jimmy Devin, Minister of State for Science Technology and Innovation, Mr Peter O'Hagan, SERCO, Mr Paul Relis, Managing Director Microsoft Ireland, Mr Thomas Hennessy, Studywiz

Co. Meath VEC – IT Open Day: *Exploring a Model for Delivering 21st Century Learning*

Over 80 people from many parts of the country attended County Meath VEC's IT Open Day on 6 April in Dunshaughlin Community College. Over recent years County Meath VEC has partnered with several major technology companies to provide the IT infrastructure to help deliver 21st century learning in their schools and centres. These companies include Microsoft, Etech, Studywiz, Dell and Serco.

The main aim of the open day was to provide our colleagues with an opportunity to see some of the many innovations in learning and administration at Co. Meath VEC and to talk to people directly involved in creating these initiatives. Among those who attended were many VEC IT specialists well as representatives from IVEA, JMB, ACCS, NCTE and a number of colleague VECs.



The Minister of State for Science Technology and Innovation, Dr Jimmy Devin, complimented all on the initiative. Addressing the group at the end of the day, the Minister praised the work of Meath VEC in promoting a leading edge approach to delivering learning across the entire VEC. In his address, Mr Paul Relis, M.D. Microsoft Ireland, confirmed the commitment of Microsoft to partnering with schools and educators to further the development of 21st Century learning and preparing our young people for the challenges of the global economy.

Scoil Chonglais Baltinglass 'Links Programme'

As part of the Scoil Chonglais Links programme, over 270 fifth and sixth class students from local primary schools visited the school for the annual Maths and Science Open Days on 11 and 12 November. The programme has been running for the last number of years and has helped students in the transition from primary to secondary school.

As part of the day's events, students had the opportunity to test their own, home-built water rockets and to create their own earthquakes. Although the event is an important part of Science Week at the school, students also participated in activities in Physical Education, Art and Engineering.



Primary School students at the Scoil Chonglais Baltinglass Science Day as part of the schools 'Links Programme'

Challenges facing the VEC Further Education Sector in a Changing Economic Climate

Over the past twenty years, the VEC sector developed its further education services in response to the changing needs of its learners. The sector has responded to labour market requirements, the National Development Plan, the policies and initiatives of the Department of Education and Science and international good practice in Further Education.

The IVEA and the management and staff of the VECs have worked with all the interested parties in further education – the DES, TUI, FETAC, HETAC, NQAI, FAS, the Universities, the Institutes of Technology, the Teaching Council, IBEC and many other agencies. This has resulted in a quality assured further education and training sector in Ireland that delivers qualifications that are recognised and accepted throughout the world.

It was recognised by all parties that, despite its strength, flexibility and innovation, the informal nature of Further Education provision needed a more formal management structure.

Following a comprehensive negotiation process, an agreement was signed off by the IVEA, TUI and Department of Education and Science on July 23rd, 2008. The agreement provided, for the first time ever, a management structure the PLC area. The plan was to continue the negotiations in order to agree a structure for the other areas of FE. Unfortunately the economic crisis has made it impossible for the Department of Education and Science to provide resources to implement the July 23rd Agreement or the wider FE sector.

This change of events poses major challenges for the VEC sector which must be addressed by all parties working together over the next few months. There is a danger that unless the sector can find agreed and innovative ways of moving forward, a vacuum will be created that will be actively filled by other private providers.

THE KEY CHALLENGES INCLUDE:

Teacher Allocation & Capping PLC Enrolments

The change in teacher allocation from 16:1 to 17:1 results in an approximate reduction of 111 teacher equivalents from the PLC sector. The majority of these are employed in the VEC sector.

The increase in the number of approved PLC places (announced by the Minister in his Budget speech on 7th April) by 1,500 is most welcome. It is essential that these places, and an equivalent teacher allocation, are made available for the 2009/2010 session. Early notice of the distribution of these to facilitate appropriate planning is also very important.

The net result of the PTR change and the provision of additional places is a loss of 23 WTE's. This must be seen in the context of a PLC sector that takes in more learners than it has approved places for. In 2008/9 the DES approved 28,000 PLC places but

the sector enrolled 31,000 learners. The additional 3,000 learners were accommodated by teachers taking extra numbers in their classes at no extra cost to DES. The ability to accommodate these additional learners will be reduced if the teacher allocation is significantly reduced. And this at a time when there is an ever-increasing demand for PLC courses from traditional learners and from the new unemployed

Individual schools may well find that for the first time ever and as a result of the teacher allocation reduction, they now have a permanent staff commitment that is in excess of their individual school teacher allocation. This situation has also been compounded by the application of unqualified CID status to many staff members.

Reassignment of PLC supernumerary teachers from one centre to another within a VEC is complex. Many of the teachers are employed as CIDs under CL of 32/92 to deliver specific modules for awards and these modules may not be available in other schools or centres within the VEC. In other cases if the specialist teacher cannot be retained and an essential mandatory module cannot therefore be delivered, a whole course and its learners can be endangered.

The full implications of these changes in pupil teacher ratio for PLC providers, the effects of the cap on PLC enrolments and the ability of VECs to respond to the needs of the unemployed, must be explored further by all parties involved in FE.

FETAC New Assessment procedures:

All VECs have obligations under their Quality Assurance Agreement to implement the new assessment procedures introduced by FETAC on 1st July 2008. The resources to enable the implementation of this process were agreed for the PLC sector and additional resources were also to be discussed for the FE non-mainstream sector. Due to the current economic climate, these proposed resources are no longer available for now or in the foreseeable future. To assist the VEC sector in the current year, FETAC have agreed to provide a dual system of assessment until JUNE 2009. From June 2009 all providers will be obliged to operate the new system.

VECs must now engage in discussions with all the interested parties DES, TUI, FETAC and other providers to consider are there innovative ways in which the new system might be introduced with little or no additional burden on individual class teachers.

FETAC Programme Validation:

Traditionally the VEC sector played a major role in the development of FETAC awards and programmes. From now on all new awards will be developed by Standard Development Groups and not by individual providers. Current awards will be migrated to the new system and new programmes will have to be developed for them and the new awards. These programmes can be developed by individual or groups of providers and submitted to FETAC for validation.

New level 3 awards will be approved by FETAC shortly and new awards will have to be developed and approved at levels 1 – 6 to meet the education and training needs of those losing their jobs or going on short-time.

The VEC sector must find ways to engage in the development of programmes to deliver these awards. If the VEC sector does not engage in programme development then other providers, particularly private providers, will step in. In the absence of direct resources, the VEC sector must seek alternative ways to engage in programme development.

To be unable to engage in programme development at this critical time would be a disaster for the learners, staff and the VEC sector as a whole.

Programme Self-evaluation:

FETAC is insisting that all VECs must fulfil their obligations under their Quality Assurance Agreement to carry out self-evaluation of their programmes and services. It must also be recognised that, long before any FETAC requirements were identified, VEC colleges and centres routinely evaluated their programmes on an annual basis.

However, many VECs are finding it difficult to fulfil the FETAC obligation due to lack of resources. Further discussions between

all parties as to how to deal with this matter need to take place soon.

Qualifications of FE Teachers & Tutors:

Circular 56/08 stipulates that only teachers registered with the Teaching Council may be given a CID. This is causing major difficulties for the FE sector as many of its teachers and tutors do not meet the requirements for registration but are fully qualified to deliver FETAC modules at the various levels 1-6 and may qualify for a CID under employment legislation.

It is recognised by all parties that a new category of tutor with its own salary scale and terms and conditions needs to be established and that discussions on this matter should take place as a matter of urgency.

In conclusion...

Since its foundation in the 1930s, the VEC sector has a proud tradition of innovation, flexibility and responsiveness to the needs of society and the country as a whole. It is also proud of its ability to work with its main partners in education, the Department of Education and Science, TUI and FETAC to find solutions with them, to the many complex problems which have arisen down the years. We look forward to engaging with our partners over the coming months to try and meet the challenges above in a fair and equitable manner so that we can continue to provide our learners with the best quality assured further education service.

Co. Mayo VEC Celebrates Aontas' Adult Learners' Festival

Co. Mayo VEC hosted an Adult Learners' Fair in the McWilliam Hotel in Claremorris on 6 February last; the third annual nationwide festival of its kind in the Mayo area.

It was designed to help adults find out how to learn new skills, brush up on existing skills, take a second chance course, do an access course or a higher certificate and help them find information on education, grants, and avail of Department and Social and Family affairs Back to Education schemes.

The Adult Learners' Fair provided an opportune way to showcase the work of: local education groups, VEC centres and services, Community Education groups, Family Resource Centres, Further and Higher Education. The Fair was a particularly unique event bringing together all those involved in community, workplace, further and higher education in Mayo. Various organisations took part and people had an opportunity to talk to local providers about what courses and training were on offer. Dr Katie Sweeney CEO, Co. Mayo VEC, presented awards to learners and invited participants to take the opportunity to visit the displays and source information on educational services in the area. All in all, demonstrating again, the importance of the local connectivity of VECs in delivering education and training services and successfully working in co-operation with partners at grass-roots community level.



Pictured at the Aontas' Adult Learners Festival were: Ms Noelle Staunton, ALO & BTEI Co-ordinator East Mayo, Ms Barbara Ronayne, Adult Guidance Counsellor, Ms Sheila Mc Gee, Adult Learner, Mr Paul Derrig, IT Tutor, Ms Jackie Evans, IT Tutor, Ms Fiona Quinn Bailie, Adult Refugee Programme Co-ordinator and Mr Pat Higgins, AEO



Ms Mary McDonnell, Information Officer and Ms Barbara Ronayne, Adult Guidance Counsellor, Co. Mayo VEC

Co. Kildare VEC students and tutors at the launch of 'Coming Together'



'Education is not the filling of a bucket but the lighting of a fire'
– W. B. Yeats

Co. Kildare VEC's Adult Basic Education Service recently published a collection of writings called 'Coming Together' compiled by adult students attending four ABE centres across the county.

Hosted by the ABE Service, Mr Peter Sheridan (writer, theatre director and playwright) gave the keynote speech at the launch of 'Coming Together'. The book portrayed the huge amount of talent and experience that the students involved possess and presents a great reflection of the diverse interests and nationalities of the writers. The book would not have been possible without the dedication and commitment of the marvellous tutors working in the Basic Education Service. By

sharing their skills, these tutors have enabled learners throughout the county to express themselves and to grow in confidence, believing they could commit their thoughts to paper for all to read.

Speaking of education, W. B Yeats said, 'Education is not the filling of a bucket but the lighting of a fire'. Returning to education is the first step in the discovery of self and thus begins the process of learning. The learning flame can never be extinguished when it is encouraged and cultivated within a positive environment. It is the challenge for all educational systems to provide this learning environment in order that more and more people can recognise and develop their talents within our society.

Co. Laois VEC Integration Project wins Star Award



On 2 February, Aontas hosted the National Star Awards (Showcasing Teamwork, Awarding Recognition) in Dublin Castle. The Star Awards celebrate the fantastic work being done

by adult learning projects throughout Ireland. Kathleen Bennett, Adult Literacy Organiser, Sandra Doyle, Resource Worker with Co. Laois VEC Adult Learning Centre and three students involved in the project attended the event to receive the Leinster Regional Award for their winning project "Integration...we all play a part...". The project has been in existence for the last three years and it reflects how Co. Laois VEC positively embraces diversity, cultural difference and helps develop cross-cultural understanding and co-operation between all people accessing our service. The award was presented by RTE's Mary Kennedy and Sean Haughey TD and Minister for Lifelong Learning. The Adult Learning Centre was one of 14 winners from over 150 projects nominated for awards throughout Ireland. The project provides all learners and tutors with a platform to assert their culture and individuality with confidence and help heighten an awareness that differences are something, which should be appreciated and celebrated. Sandra Doyle (Project Co-ordinator, and students from Co. Laois VEC Adult Learning Centre were also interviewed about the winning project on national radio 'NEWSTALK' Radio 106FM on an intercultural programme called 'Global Village'.

Waterford College of Further Education and Waterford Institute of Technology formalise Co-operation Agreement

Waterford College of Further Education (WCFE), a City of Waterford VEC college, and Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT) have ratified a co-operation agreement aimed at easing student transition from further to higher education in the South-East by the signing of a formal co-operation agreement.

Speaking at the signing of the new agreement, Prof Kieran R Byrne said: "Waterford College of Further Education builds on a proud tradition of diverse educational provision inclusive of all communities in Waterford. The College was established in Waterford as the Central Technical Institute 102 years ago. It makes a great deal of sense for us to co-operate ever more closely to ensure there are a minimum of obstacles facing students looking to make the transition from further to higher education."

Gerard Morgan, at the signing said: "Many formal and informal links already exist between our College and the Institute. The agreement that we now enter in to will put a more formal structure on some of these ties and we look forward to seeing a growing number of our graduates go on to continue their studies at Waterford Institute of Technology which has earned a reputation as one of the country's leading higher education institutions.

"Access to higher education is a key issue as we look to up-skill the population so that Ireland may better face new social and economic challenges. This agreement is a step forward in this regard and will allow us best equip those of our students wishing to transfer to higher education on completion of their studies here."



Since the agreement was signed in July 2008 many developments have followed. WCFE has recently agreed progression options for WCFE students completing FETAC level 6 courses in Childcare and Business Studies.

These students can now progress onto the second year of higher level/degree courses in WIT following the completion of the course in WCFE. Also an enhanced points system is available for WCFE students for entry into WIT. It is envisaged that many more co-operation initiatives will emerge as a result of this agreement between WCFE and WIT in the future.

'A B Sea' – Literacy Project for the Galway Fishing Industry, Wins 2009 EBS/NALA Award

On 6 March 2009, 'A B Sea', Co. Galway VEC's project aimed at supporting early school leavers who are involved in the fishing industry has been awarded the prestigious 2009 EBS / NALA Adults Continuing Education (ACE) Awards for its innovative work within the sector. Co. Galway VEC, West Galway Adult Learning Centre, An Fuarán, Moycullen was awarded a €10,000 research grant by EBS Building Society at an award ceremony held at Dublin Castle. The awards, now in their fourth year, are supported by the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) and EBS Building Society.

As overall winners, Galway's 'A B Sea' project developed by Teresa Gilligan, Adult Literacy Organiser and Audrey Byrne, Adult Literacy Tutor, were given €10,000 to further develop and publish their research which identifies the specific literacy-based needs of the fishing community. Findings from the project will be shared with other adult literacy practitioners and will help to influence good practice across the sector.



(L to R) Ms Teresa Gilligan, Adult Literacy Organiser, Co. Galway VEC, Mary Hanafin, T.D., Minister for Social and Family Affairs and Ms Audrey Byrne, Adult Literacy Tutor, Co. Galway VEC.

Co. Tipperary N.R. VEC's latest European Project: *Acquisition of Basic Competences through Social and Digital Inclusion*

In recent years North Tipperary VEC has initiated and participated in a number of European Partnerships including: the *Mol An Óige Project* (a systemic response to the challenges of educational disadvantage and social exclusion) and *New Futures* (the design of lifelong learning responses to the economic and social challenges facing agricultural communities in Ireland and throughout Europe). These experiences, among others, provided insights and innovations as well as an understanding of various countries and cultures throughout Europe. Our most recent project entitled '*Acquisition Of Basic Competences Through Social And Digital Inclusion*' is a Learning Partnership which includes Spain and Turkey.

The aim of this project is to develop innovative approaches related to citizenship, second-language development senior citizens and the unemployed. In particular, the project focuses on the relationship between ICT, second language learning, social inclusion, active citizenship, and family learning.

At a recent partnership meeting in Zaragoza, Spain, it was agreed that North Tipperary VEC will explore the feasibility of enabling active-retired citizens to provide English language support to adults from non-English-speaking countries. It is envisioned that ICT will provide an important component in the provision of the programme.

As a result of this programme North Tipperary VEC hopes that a number of non-English speaking residents will improve their English speaking and writing skills, a number of active retired people will become engaged with education and all participants will see the benefits of ICT. Ultimately it is hoped that the benefits of collaboration and interdependence as well as citizenship will be valued by all. The project runs from September 2008 – 2010.



Mr Dan Condren, Principal, St Sheelan's (second left) and Mr Brian Donnelly Community Education Officer (third left) featured in the group in Turkey in November 2008



Brian Donnelly (left) Community Education Officer, and Dr Noel Colleran (third left) R&D Officer at the meeting in Zaragoza in March 2009

STAR Award Winners



A warm congratulations to Bronagh, Daniel, Fiona, Freda, Linda, John and Ray. Their programme was awarded the 2009 National Winner of the AONTAS Star Awards.

Leading Into Further Education (LIFE) is a two-year pilot programme run by Dun Laoghaire VEC, the Health Service Executive and St. John of Gods-Carmona Services for people with intellectual disabilities looking to progress to further education, training and employment).

As Daniel says "I love the VEC forever!! I have had a great time in college so far... I have learned loads and made new friends".

Life Chances and Disadvantage



By
**MR MICHAEL
MORIARTY**
IVEA General
Secretary

EDUCATIONAL disadvantage is defined in the Education Act, 1998, as “the impediments to education arising from social and economic disadvantage which prevent students from deriving appropriate benefit from education in schools.” And “appropriate benefit” in this context is generally understood to mean the *opportunity for each person to achieve their full potential. Educational disadvantage refers to those educational outcomes, which are shaped by socio-economic influences, rather than individual, personal aptitudes.*

Educational disadvantage cannot be divorced from socio-economic disadvantage. Educational disadvantage, or advantage, mirrors society. It is about the distribution of life’s chances.

While there have been significant educational gains for many from the lower socio-economic backgrounds during recent years, the bar keeps rising. The better-off have the means to access a range of opportunities not available to the financially disadvantaged. The fact is that money talks and does bestow an advantage, including educational advantage. The obligation rests with the State to re-balance that advantage.

Education may be the main vehicle by which inequality and exclusion can be reduced. There is a very real cost to the State if this objective is not firmly at the centre of government policy. A fair and inclusive education is a human rights imperative and must be seen also in the context of the long-term social and financial costs of education failure.

There is a consensus that a good start in life is key to breaking the cycle of disadvantage. We need to concentrate and focus resources as early as possible in a child’s life if we are to adequately support the child from disadvantaged circumstances through the educational life cycle.

This task must continue throughout life. Access to Lifelong Learning must remain a key strategic response to the needs of the socio-economically disadvantaged and the educationally disadvantaged as they are more likely to be in and out of employment and in need of re-training and up-skilling.

The State had recognised the need to provide supports to those who are socially, economically and educationally disadvantaged. There is no lack of vision in this State to address socio-economic disadvantage. The National Development Plan 2000-2006 talks about “creating a more inclusive society by alleviating exclusion, poverty and deprivation.” But it must address the causes of disadvantage in a wider policy context as well as in the direct context of educational disadvantage through an integrated and multi-faceted approach.

What is lacking is the real inter-agency coherence and collaboration, despite recent trends in that direction. All agencies and bodies engaged in the delivery of programmes need to work in collaboration as part of a coherent delivery framework. Integration of a number of previous programmes and supports under the DEIS programme is a step in the right direction.

There is a need for an overseeing body that is both local and statutorily accountable, which can coordinate delivery of such programmes within a specifically defined catchment area. The VECs, as local education authorities, can play such a role, and IVEA proposes a Disadvantage Committee at local county level.

The recent Government cutbacks in the education sector have not ring-fenced the supports for the vulnerable and disadvantaged. On the contrary, educational disadvantage supports to many schools have been cut, particularly those not in the DEIS programme. Those pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds but not in designated “disadvantaged” schools may now be left to fend for themselves in schools which have considerably fewer resources and less capacity to address their needs.

If we are to seriously diminish the impact of socio-economic disadvantage which prevents some of our students from realising their full share of life’s chances and their opportunity to achieve their full potential, then we need to remain focussed on integrated, inter-departmental educational strategies as well as local partnership between a wide range of agencies working in tandem to support the most disadvantaged.

Official opening of Co. Cork VEC's new offices at Yeats' House

Mr Batt O'Keeffe, T.D., Minister for Education & Science officially opened the new head office of Co. Cork VEC located at Yeats' House, Barrack Square, Ballincollig, Co. Cork in December last.



Mr Martin Hallahan PO; Mr. Bobby Buckley (former CEO); Mr Barra O'Briain CEO., Very Rev. Canon George Salter; Minister O'Keeffe; Cllr Noel O'Connor, Chairman CCVEC and Ms Joan Russell EO, CCVEC

New Schools for City of Galway VEC

THE Minister for Education and Science Mr Batt O'Keefe sanctioned the inclusion of a post-primary school to cater for 720 students and a primary school of 16 classrooms for 420 students for the City of Galway VEC in the new "bundle" of schools announced in December. These two new schools will be built in Dougiska, a new growing suburb on the east side of Galway city. This is a significant development for the City of Galway VEC and it provides a great new challenge to create and manage a new multicultural education campus for both primary and post-primary students. City of Galway has recently purchased a site at Knocknacarra, Galway for Coláiste na Coiribe. The Coláiste will move to this new school, hopefully within four years. The school will have a capacity for 700 students. All three schools are being built under the Public Private Partnership scheme.

A note on matters concerning student support schemes

IVEA is currently engaged in meetings with the Department of Education & Science, Higher Equity of Access Section, through a Bilateral Steering Group which last met on 24 March 2009.

- **Regarding the Student Support Bill:**

The Bill completed the second stage in the Dail on 30 April 2008. A range of legal issues meriting Attorney General advice has resulted in the Bill not progressing as quickly as hoped. Nonetheless, it is anticipated that the Bill will move to Committee stage before the summer recess. The DES has confirmed its commitment to the VECs' involvement as outlined in the Bill.

- The increase in applications made to VECs in respect of the 2008/9 year is a strong indication of the need for the accelerated passage of the Bill. In this regard, IVEA is confident that the passage of the Bill will provide a sound basis on which our sector can ensure the efficient delivery of a fair and equitable student grants system to

students, parents and families who, in such concerning economic times, need access to further and higher education more than ever.

- **Regarding the issuing of Schemes:** IVEA was advised that for the coming year (September 2009/10), the Schemes are likely to issue in early May.
- **A series of round table discussions** are ongoing with the various stakeholders (including IVEA/VECs) with a view to seeking a common position on verification of attendances of students in various institutions.
- **Funding for the proposed introduction of an IT system for grants' administration is currently on hold, as is the case for additional resources.** IVEA is engaged in talks to seek to advance matters.
- **It is very likely however, that no change in the current administration of student support schemes will take place in for the coming academic year September 2009.**

Mr Larry Kavanagh CEO, Co. Carlow VEC retires

Mr Larry Kavanagh has given over 40 years of service to education, being first appointed in 1971 to the teaching staff of Hacketstown Vocational School, where Larry served as a teacher, post holder, Vice-principal and Principal over a period of some twenty-eight years. Acknowledging that he was "proud to have spent my life working in the Vocational Education system.... which embraces all students regardless of age, ability, race, creed, or social background...his greatest love has always been working with and teaching students in the classroom especially when years later so many come back and say thank you". Larry was an active member of IVEA, PDA and TUI and the VEC National Partnership Forum where its National Co-ordinator, Ms Gwen Moore has described Larry as "an active and committed member and a tireless advocate for partnership in the VEC sector".

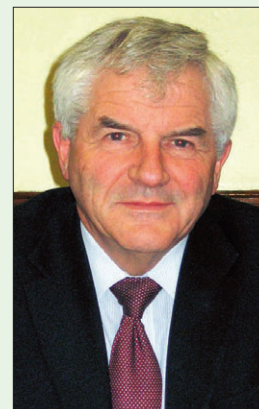


In Co. Carlow VEC, Larry was particularly proud of the huge development and expansion of the education programmes and services e.g. B.T.E.I., C.E.F., Youthreach, Youth Services and Youth Officer, Y.P.F.S.F. and services to support our programmes such as its Childcare Centre, Adult Education Initiative and the continuing increase in student numbers and the expansion of Carlow VEC's FE Programme.

IVEA is particularly grateful to Larry for his personal commitment, vision and support to the work of the Association over the past ten years, shown in all his personal dealings for, and on behalf of, IVEA. We wish Larry a very enjoyable retirement.

Mr Eamon Cooney CEO, Co. Louth VEC retires

Mr Eamon Cooney began his career in education as a Science teacher with Co. Donegal VEC in 1968. In 1971, Eamon joined the staff of the then Town of Drogheda VEC becoming in 1980, Vice-principal and then Principal of a new School St Oliver's which was to become the second largest school in the country (with 1300 students) and of St Laurence's Community College, now known as the Drogheda Institute of Further Education.



As an educationalist, he was a man ahead of his time – through his dedicated team of teachers Eamon ensured that teaching is not just about the effective transfer of knowledge but more importantly the growth development and self esteem of the student as a whole, thus placing the student at the centre of the learning process. In 1996, he became CEO of Town of Drogheda VEC and with the amalgamation of both Co. Louth and the Town of Drogheda VECs, he became the first Education Officer for Co Louth and in February 2007, became CEO of Co Louth VEC.

Eamon has been described as having "a wonderful sense of humour and a great motivator of people. He was a leader who always knew that teaching must keep changing to embrace the opportunities, challenges of our times. He was a wonderful mentor for young teachers and was always supportive in times of need".

We wish Eamon a very enjoyable retirement.



Vocational College New Ross bids farewell to Principal, Mr Pat Murphy

Former New Ross Vocational College Principal Mr Pat Murphy on the occasion of his retirement with newly appointed Principal Ms Suzanne Barrett.

Innovation Island: VEC Efficiency & Engagement in 2009

By GWEN MOORE, National Administrator, VECNPF

"Ireland faces challenging economic circumstances but there are also great opportunities on the horizon"

Building Ireland's Smart Economy: A framework for Sustainable Economic Renewal (2008)

In his foreword to Building Ireland's Smart Economy: A Framework for Sustainable Economic Renewal, An Taoiseach, Mr Brian Cowen T.D. argues that the best prospect of achieving a smart economy lies with a collective, national effort grounded in the values of partnership. The framework declares that Innovation is the key building block to achieving a smart economy where productivity, quality outcomes, flexibility and the management of performance are inextricably linked to the provision of efficient, effective and value for money public services. For the VEC sector to respond effectively to the recession, the co-operation and flexibility of staff in implementing cost savings, efficiencies and value for money will be essential. Partnership the vocational sector has proven its capacity to facilitate employee participation and involvement and has enabled VEC co-operation to achieve smarter, networked working. Now more than ever before, VECs will require this Partnership bedrock if they are to develop and implement innovative responses to the changed economic circumstances.

"Innovation increases at a time of crisis"

Lucy Fallon-Byrne, Director, NCPP (2008)

In 2008, the VEC sector showed itself willing and able to play its part in building the Innovation Island. Last year, VECNPF initiatives included Regional Innovation Fora and Innovation Sessions for VEC Customer Service representatives, Support Staff and Adult Education staff. Workplace Innovation Week and the National Innovation Awards raised the profile of workplace innovation, identified VEC innovation champions and practices and recognised their achievements in a formal presentation in Thomond Park. A Forum Theatre presentation at the awards ceremony energised and engaged VEC staff and management through its highly interactive and participative method. Just as Partnership offered the firm bedrock

from which the VECNPF could help release their innovative capacity, Innovation must now become the key enabler of employee engagement, cost savings and greater productivity in 2009. The following offers a brief outline of developmental initiatives that will be undertaken by the VECNPF in 2009:

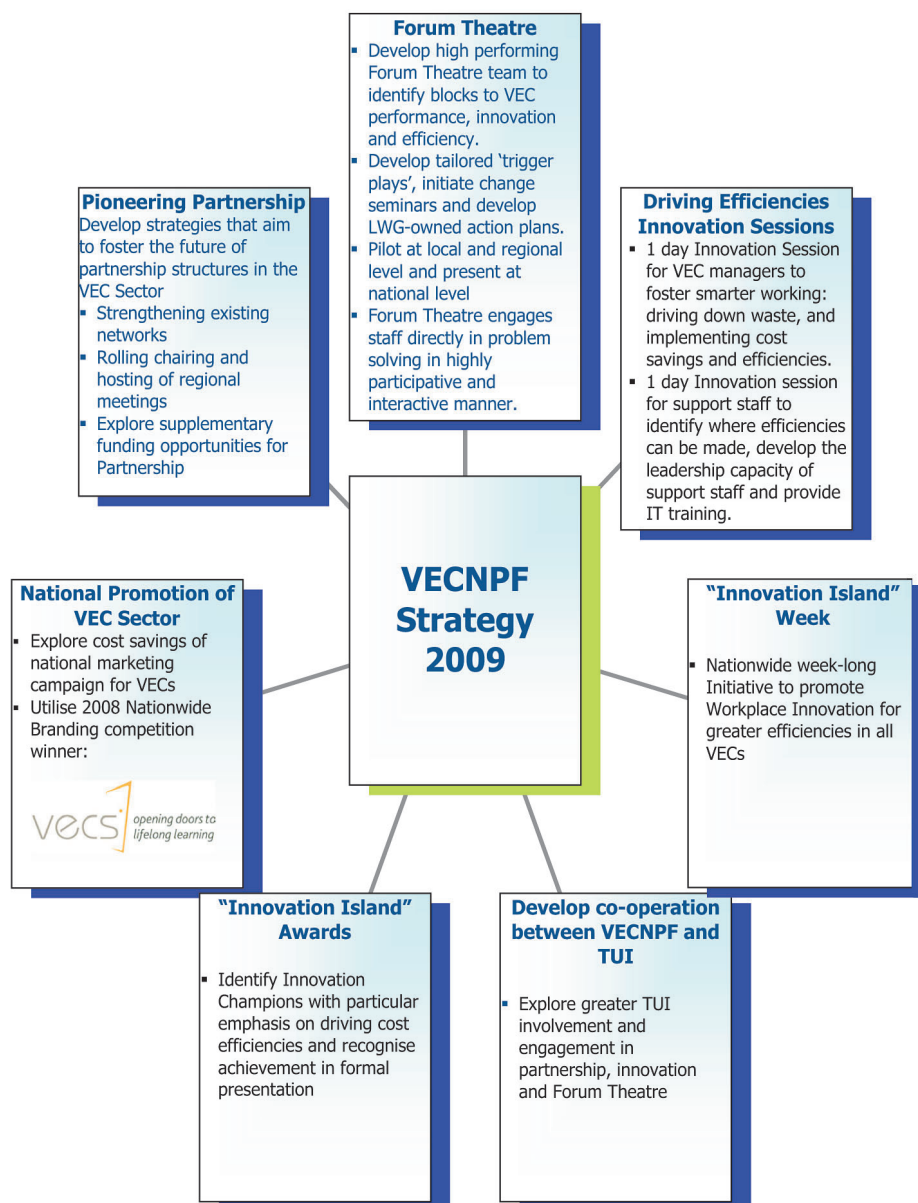
The Innovative Workplace

Greater levels of employee involvement and engagement are a key component in the delivery of cost-effective, integrated, innovative and customer focussed VEC services. Increased employee involvement and engagement has been shown to strengthen organisational performance,

increase customer satisfaction and promote higher levels of public confidence and trust in public bodies.* For VECs, this will involve:

- engaging employees in innovation and problem solving
- the encouragement and recognition employee creativity and innovation by VEC senior managers
- fostering employee ownership of greater efficiencies
- the provision of innovative learning opportunities as these help drive productivity and performance.**

{*&**NCPP}



New CEO appointed to Co. Carlow VEC

Ms Cynthia Deane is a native of Dublin and a graduate of UCD and Trinity College. She started her career with the City of Dublin VEC in 1974, as a teacher of English and Humanities in Coláiste Dhúlaigh, Coolock. In 1986 she moved to the Co. Dublin VEC and became Deputy Principal of Jobstown Community College in Tallaght. She spent two years with the CDVEC Curriculum Development Unit, and she has also taught in higher education and in teacher training. In her role as Chief Executive of the National Council for Vocational Awards (NCVA, now FETAC) from 1994 to 2000, Cynthia was involved in initiating development of the National Framework of Qualifications.



Ms Cynthia Deane takes up her position as the new CEO of Co. Carlow VEC in JUNE 2009

In 2001, Cynthia set up an independent education consulting practice and for eight years she worked with clients in the public, private, voluntary, not-for-profit and philanthropic sectors, in Ireland and internationally. She has worked on many projects that promote access to lifelong learning, in which she has a special interest. She has also had a high international profile through her work with the European Commission as an expert on recognition of qualifications and she has advised on the reform of education and training systems in countries including Cyprus, Estonia, Poland, Georgia, Egypt and Afghanistan (where she worked with the World Bank).

IVEA wishes Cynthia every success in her new post as CEO of Co. Carlow VEC.

New CEO appointed to Co. Louth VEC

Dr Pádraig Kirk, a former student and teacher of Co. Louth Vocational Education Committee, takes up his position as the new CEO of Co. Louth VEC in April 2009. Having obtained his Bachelor and Masters Degrees in Education and Engineering from the University of Limerick, Pádraig returned to teach engineering and Technical Drawing in O'Faich College for seven years between 1993 and 2000. During this time he studied for a H. Dip. in Educational Management.



Dr Pádraig Kirk takes up his position as CEO of Co. Louth VEC in April 2009.

Pádraig moves to Co. Louth VEC from the Department of Education and Science where he has worked as a Senior Inspector in the Inspectorates' Evaluation Support and Research Unit (ESRU). For the previous two years he was attached to the Institution of Engineers of Ireland based in Ballsbridge, fronting a national awareness programme on engineering, science and technology, aimed at promoting these subjects as a career choice among second-level students. As a school inspector, Pádraig led whole school evaluations and programme and subject inspections in post-primary schools. He was responsible for numerous Inspectorate publications and spearheaded the Inspectorates' evaluations of centres for education; evaluations that have led to enhanced status for these centres and to improved outcomes for learners.

As holder also of a doctorate of education from NUI, Maynooth, Pádraig believes that his teaching and private sector experience, as well as his time in the Department of Education & Science has provided him with tremendous insights into the second-level, further, adult and community education sectors – all of which are priority areas of work for the VEC.

IVEA wishes Pádraig every success in his new post as CEO of Co. Louth VEC.

Ms Nessa Doyle on secondment to IVEA



Ms Nessa Doyle

Ms Nessa Doyle has recently taken up the seconded position of HR Officer in IVEA head office. Nessa has a background of working in Human Resource Management throughout the Health Service and was employed as HR Manager in Waterford Regional Hospital up to 2005 when she joined Co. Wexford VEC as APO in the HR Department. An MBS in HR Strategy has informed her career also.

In her role in IVEA, Nessa will be involved in supporting and advising IVEA management

and Executive Committees and member VECs on employee relations' matters and will work closely with the IVEA HR Forum, member VECs, the VEC NPF, the Department of Education and Science and other bodies and provide assistance, advice and support to VECs on HRM policies and strategies.

IVEA is delighted to have Nessa on the team and extends its particular thanks to the Department of Education and Science and to Co. Wexford VEC for its co-operation in Nessa's secondment.

Building High Performance Innovation Award at the VEC National Partnership Forum's Annual Conference

STAFF of Co. Westmeath VEC were the proud recipients of the inaugural "Building High Performance Innovation Award" at the VEC National Partnership Forum's Annual Conference.

The conference took place in December at the newly redeveloped Thomond Park Stadium in Limerick; home of 2008 Heineken Cup Champions Munster RFC. The award was in recognition of a number of environmental initiatives introduced recently in Castlepollard Community College and in the VEC head office, Mullingar, and was chosen from a total of 175 entries from 33 different VECs.

Mr Micheal Cassidy, Caretaker, Castlepollard Community College, Ms Maria Fox, Youth Officer and Ms Marian Whelan, a member of the administrative staff of Westmeath VEC came up with a number of simple and innovative measures to reduce the volumes of water and paper used in Westmeath VEC. The award-winning ideas from Westmeath can now be used by other VECs throughout the country. Irish Olympic silver medal winner Kenny Egan presented the award. Commenting on their win, Mr Gearóid Ó



Brádaigh CEO, Co. Westmeath VEC, said: "the award is due recognition of the efforts of staff in Westmeath VEC to constantly review and streamline their work processes, while also looking at new ways to reduce costs and to improve

our service to our learners and to the public. In the current economic climate, it is highly appropriate that public servants look critically at their performance in this way, and I am delighted at the example the staff here have set."

Co. Cavan VEC 'Can do'!

Co. Cavan VEC recently held an inaugural staff day for all staff throughout the scheme. It was attended by staff from all levels and focused on the theme of organisational cohesiveness. Characterised by active staff involvement in its design, the schedule for the day drew its inspiration from Goal 5 of the VEC Education Plan with a range of presentations, keynote speakers and workshops designed to meet the needs of all staff.

The opening address was delivered by Professor Tom Collins, Head of Education Department, NUI Maynooth, with the keynote address from Mr Mickey Harte which focused on motivation and its role in education.

Concluding the day Co Cavan VEC CEO Mr Colm McEvoy focused on the challenges facing the VEC and its ability to meet those challenges. Thanking the



Colm McEvoy, CEO Co Cavan VEC and members of the organising committee for the Co. Cavan VEC CPD Staff Event

staff for their 'can-do' approach and willingness to embrace change and meet the demands of the people of Co Cavan,

he further challenged them to develop the spirit of continuous professional development within the county.

The Employee Assistance Service

The Employee Assistance Service (EAS) provides confidential counselling to teachers and their immediate family members

The Employee Assistance Service offers teachers a facility that is confidential, easily accessed and provides properly qualified and supervised practitioners. Sometimes, events occur that are not planned for or that set us back in both our personal and work lives. While many teachers may seek help from their own social support network (friends, colleagues, family), research by McLeod (2001) revealed that individuals who had participated in workplace counselling reported that they were highly satisfied and most strikingly stated that through counselling they had learnt something new and useful about themselves.

A comment from an individual who has accessed the EAS states that:

“The initial telephone contact was excellent and referral to a counsellor prompt. I believe the EAS gave me a “gift”...I have actively recommended it to colleagues”.

During 2008, a review of the evaluations received regarding the EAS reveal that 100% of individuals would use the service again, 100% would recommend the service to others and 100% believe that the EAS is a positive benefit provided by the Department of Education and Science.

What is an Employee Assistance Service?

The purpose of the EAS is to provide teachers and their immediate family members with easy access to confidential short term

counselling and to assist in coping with the effect of personal and work-related issues. The service was introduced in 2006 as a benefit to teachers and is funded by the Department of Education and Science.

Who is the service available to?

The service is available to teachers whose positions are funded by the Department of Education and Science, their spouses or partners, their dependents above the age of 16 and mother/ father where appropriate and can be accessed by a dedicated freephone number or email address.

What services are available?

- Telephone Counselling – single sessions or up to six counselling sessions
- Face to Face counselling – up to six counselling sessions

How do I know the service is confidential?

VHI Corporate Solutions, an external provider, deliver the EAS and their staff follow strict ethical guidelines and codes of practice and are bound by the rules of the Irish Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy (IACP). This means that any contact with you remains confidential and that no information about you is available to anyone without your written consent.

The EAS is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.



For additional information on the EAS just click on to the Department of Education and Science Website, www.education.ie and follow the link provided.



Co. Tipperary S.R. VEC – Anne-Marie McGrath figures very highly!

Congratulations to Ms. Ann-Marie McGrath, Co. Tipperary S.R. VEC who achieved first place in Ireland and fourth internationally in one of her ACCA (Association of Chartered Certified

Accountants) exams in June 2008. Ann-Marie was presented with an award in October by Tipperary Institute in recognition of her impressive achievement.

PHOTO GALLERY

Co. Dublin VEC hosts annual Music Festival

With each edition, we are proposing to select from articles and submissions, a photo gallery from a VEC demonstrating a particular event that has taken place within that VEC. In this edition, we are profiling the annual Music Festival hosted by Co. Dublin VEC on 10 March 2009 in the National Concert Hall, Dublin.



Minister for Education and Science, Mr Batt O'Keeffe T.D. acknowledging the excellence of teachers and students at Co. Dublin VEC's Festival of Music

Enhancing Ireland's Education and Training System

IRELAND'S education system has been a key contributor to economic growth and improvements in living standards in recent years. It is essential that our policymakers and educators are ambitious and continue to strive for the best outcomes for our students.

The National Competitiveness Council (NCC) recently published a paper on education policy, highlighting the policy priorities to enhance our education and training system.



By Dr Don Thornhill,
Chairman, National
Competitiveness Council

Teacher quality is fundamental to the success of the education and training system. In Irish schools and higher education institutions there are limited opportunities for teachers to share best practice. Professional and in-service development needs to be continuous, strongly school based and progressive throughout a teacher's career - not just when new syllabi are introduced. This is particularly important as developments in Information Technology offer exciting new opportunities to enliven teaching and learning.

In view of the sharp rise in unemployment, the current challenge is to ensure that investments are targeted in areas where skills shortages are forecast and in sectors where potential exists for future employment growth. While the recent increase in the number of activation and training places is a welcome development, the

nature and quality of the retraining options available to develop and enhance the skills sets of the newly unemployed remains an issue.

Notwithstanding the dramatic rise in unemployment and the consequent need for retraining, upgrading the skills level of the workforce will be increasingly dependent on addressing the needs of those already in employment. Although sixty percent of the 2020 workforce is already employed, changes in technology and business processes will have rendered many of their skills obsolete by that time. These developments mean that the Irish education and training system must increasingly cater for the needs of those already in the workforce and promote a culture of lifelong learning.

We do not have the luxury of being able to promote reform through additional public expenditure. Using resources effectively means making choices and focusing on priority strategies. The available evidence does not support the view that lower class sizes automatically result in better student outcomes. Reducing class sizes is expensive; excessive focus on this area can deflect scarce resources from other more effective strategies - including professional development.

Education is an area of policy whose importance extends well beyond the economic arena. The NCC believes that the implementation of our recommendations, though primarily relating to competitiveness, will also contribute to achieving social, cultural and moral progress. The NCC's Statement on Education and Training is available at www.competitiveness.ie

UPCOMING EVENTS

Launch of the History of IVEA –

IVEA is delighted to announce that Minister Batt O'Keeffe will launch the official history of IVEA on 27 JUNE 2009 in the EU Offices, Dawson Street, Dublin. IVEA wishes to pay particular tribute to the author Mr Jim Cooke for his exceptional commitment to the research and publication of *IVEA's History* and also to Mr Michael O'Lionain and Mr Barra O'Briain; both of whom provided extensive editorial support and advice.

IVEA and Department work together to develop a support for VECs on the implications of superannuation for part-time staff

IVEA is pleased to announce that a working group of VEC staff with particular expertise is set to join with Department officials for

its first meeting on 13 JUNE 2009 to develop a support manual for VECs on the implications for part-time staff on superannuation. Mr Jack Lynch EO, Co. Sligo VEC will chair the group and will be assisted by IVEA Secretariat staff and senior Department officials.

IVEA Summer Administrative Seminar

IVEA's annual summer administrative seminar is due to take place from 17-19 June 2009 in the Strand Hotel, Limerick. Booking forms and an agenda are presently being compiled and will issue to all VECs very shortly.

Bulletins will issue to VECs on other upcoming events as matters develop.



Mr Ciarán McCormack, President, NAPD and Mr Jim Moore, President, National Parents' Council PP and Chairperson of the Post-primary, Education Forum (PPEF) pictured at the NAPD/PPEF National Symposium on 5 March 2009 in the Radisson Hotel, Dublin.



Delegates at the symposium, Mr Tom Hughes and Mr Michael Moriarty.