

# IVEA NEWS

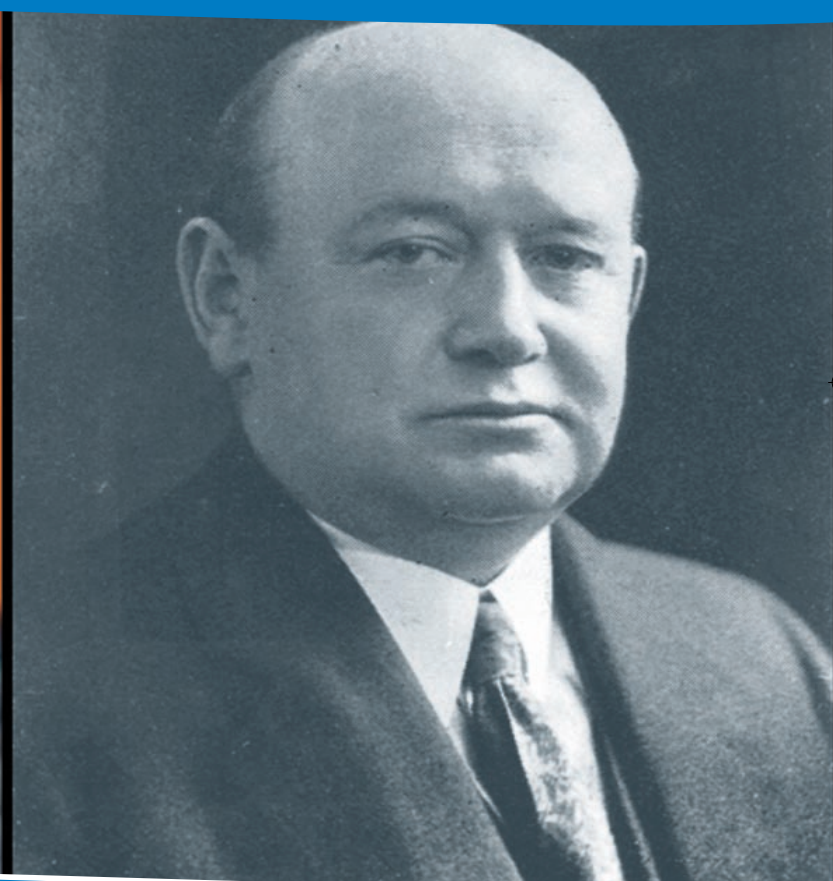
## Representing Vocational Education Committees

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

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Ministers for Education past and present  
influencing the fate of VECs

**INSIDE:**

Government changes – amalgamation agenda – page 2

Minister launches Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector – page 7

Qualifying and Upskilling FET Tutors – Learning from Developments North of the Border – page 13

## CONTENTS

**Editorial and News**

Government changes – amalgamation agenda stays	2
The Croke Park Agreement	3
IVEA Candidate elected to Seanad	3
CDVEC to operate student grant awarding authority	4
Co Monaghan VEC Unveils Education Campus Plans	5
Michael D Addresses North Tipperary VEC Staff	5
Co. Cavan VEC "ICT & Education" Seminar	6

**First and Second Level Stories**

Minister launches Forum on Patronage and Pluralism	7
VECs as patron of a State sector in primary schooling	7
Pluralism in Ireland and Religion in VEC Schools	8
The Teaching Council - Achievements and Future Priorities	10
Kerry Education Service Student Forum	11
Occupational Health Service for Teachers	12
Employee Assistance Service is extended to Retirees for up to 6 months following Retirement	12

**Adult and Further Education Stories**

Learning from Developments North of the Border	13
South Tipperary VEC Adult Learning Festival	15

**Secretariat News**

New Headquarters for the IVEA	17
"At a glance" review of Government education objectives	17
TPS Update: Co-operation to yield significant savings	19
EUpVET	20
Labour Relations Commission's Mediation Service	21
Increase in claims being made to Employment Law Forums	22
EUpVET Meeting Takes Place in Cork	22
Guidelines for dealing with Complaints of Bullying, Harassment and Sexual Harassment in VEC Workplaces	23
Soon to launch... <i>Guidelines for Schools on Data Protection</i>	25

**Initiatives**

Dr. Harold Hislop launches Co. Cork VEC's Team-Teaching DVD	26
Promoting Restorative Practices in Education in Co Donegal	26

**Upcoming Events**

2011 John Marcus O'Sullivan Summer School	27
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**New Appointments**

New Ministers	28
New CEEOA President	28

Editor: PAUL MAHON

Government changes –  
amalgamation agenda stays

HAVING met Ruairi Quinn prior to the recent general elections IVEA had hoped that the severity of the VEC amalgamations proposed by the previous government could be revised upwards from 16. Following his appointment as Minister for Education and Skills, however, the new Minister made it clear that, like his immediate predecessor, he was also in favour of sixteen new VEC entities.

IVEA was disappointed with this outcome but remained committed to enhancing the number of proposed new VEC entities more in keeping with the need to remain rooted and identified with the local community.

The Standing Council meeting on April 19 considered proposals for a revised VEC network. While there was some who disagreed with the proposal to recommend twenty new VEC entities the proposal was carried by a substantial majority. This was a difficult but courageous decision by the Standing Council. IVEA met with Minister Quinn on May 10th to address the rationalisation issue and to seek to enhance the number of new VEC entities from sixteen to twenty, in accordance with Standing Council objectives. IVEA remains hopeful that it can secure an increase in the number of proposed VEC entities from 16 to 20.

For over two years IVEA has relentlessly campaigned to preserve the VEC network which had served Ireland well for decades past. Congress 2011 did concede some limited amalgamations when it agreed that VECs be constituted on an administrative county basis.

There is a real danger that in a rush to amalgamate VECs into much larger and more remote administrative structures the mistakes of the past will be replayed. The creation of larger administrative structures in other sectors has never delivered the promised efficiencies and there is no reason to believe that the VEC sector will be any different. We should be careful about what we wish for as the proposed remote multi-county structure could mean that the deep-rooted connectedness of the local VEC with the local community may be lost.

IVEA has a clear policy position that recognises that VEC aggregation is inevitable but has real concerns that what was proposed by the previous government and which seems to have survived the change of government. While change is inevitable there needs to be some realistic balance between administrative efficiencies and local administrative structures. While local communities may value local administrative structures it seems that central government may not share this same view and seems to focus more on administrative efficiencies. Different perspectives want different outcomes but VECs are a real community asset and this fact needs to inform any final decision about the future of our VEC network.

IVEA

Representing Vocational  
Education Committees

## The Croke Park Agreement

THE eventual decision by all three teacher unions to sign up for the Croke Park Agreement has promised some stability in the education sector. In return for reform of work practices and additional time at work the unions have been assured of no further wage cuts or forced redundancies subject to certain caveats. In recent times government ministers have renewed warnings, however, that real reform is necessary in the public sector if this commitment is to be maintained.

Some government ministers have now publicly expressed concern at the rate of reform in the public service. Fearing that government may wish to pull from the Agreement the unions have, in turn, insisted that reform was on-going and that the required savings would be achieved. At their Easter congresses the teacher unions warned Minister Quinn that they would not tolerate any tampering with the provisions of the Agreement.

The first progress report on what Croke Park has achieved is to be published shortly. The robust exchanges between unions and government ministers on the scale of reform achieved to date is a lead up to that first progress report. Significant savings will need to be realised and targets will have to be achieved especially in the context of the continued depressed state of economic activity which has resulted in a significant cut in Ireland's growth forecasts.

The pay and pensions bill of the public service is €18.5 billion and it is reckoned that each post cut from the public service saves on average €55,000. The agreed target is to save €310 million this year. The moratorium on public service recruitment and the numbers taking early retirement will go some considerable way towards achieving the savings target yet some argue that the public service transformation agenda is not realistically being achieved.

In recent weeks many government ministers and some trade union officials are blaming senior management for the slow progress in reforming work practices. In these public utterances it should not be forgotten that CPA is about partners working together and that change can sometimes be resisted by all sides. A recent example being the retention of privilege days.

It is expected that up to 18,000 posts have been cut from the public service since 2008 and yet the Programme for Government commits to cutting a further 12,000 public servants than was agreed in Croke Park, meaning there are tough times ahead for the public service in the next few years.

To survive and flourish with significantly less public servants (and less teachers) will require a far more flexible public service. This is what is envisaged by the CPA and currently such flexibility is being achieved to a greater or less extent. The recent clarifications document issued by the Department

of Education and Skills clarifies the change required in work practices in schools and colleges. Similarly, negotiations on the implementation of CPA for SNAs is also delivering results. Administrative staff in VECs are also entering talks shortly but similar talks in the local government sector will also have a bearing on the flexibility of the public service especially in terms of cross sectoral redeployment.

Testing times lie ahead and the outcome of the first report on the progress of the Croke Park Agreement will have real significance. It will have to satisfy our economic masters in the IMF and ECB. It will have to show evidence of progress in achieving the declared targets.

While much of the focus is on the savings achieved there is little on the capacity of the public sector to function efficiently with considerably reduced human resources. The education sector will need to constantly evaluate how it can maintain educational programmes and services. In the words of Minister Quinn the challenge is to do more with less. But the challenge is more fundamental than that. The education sector will be challenged to adapt and change, to look at old work practices and to become more efficient. But equally the challenge is to protect the services and educational programmes to students and to do this with less resources, less staff and with the ongoing corrosive effect of the moratorium on appointments. A tall order indeed.

## IVEA Candidate Elected to Seanad

IVEA candidate, Michael Mullins, was recently elected to Seanad Éireann marking is an historic achievement for IVEA.

Senator Mullins won a competitive process over several other candidates to secure the IVEA nomination to the Cultural and Educational panel. He was a most suitably qualified candidate, having served on Galway Council since 1985, also serving during that time as Chairman and Mayor of the County. Over the years, he has been active in local authority associations and in many community, voluntary and cultural organisations.

He has served for many years as a member of County Galway



*Cllr Michael Mullins*

VEC, and was recently appointed Chairman of the Youthreach Board in Galway. He is Chairman of the Board of Management of New Inn Vocational School, Ballinasloe, as well as being a Board Member of the Community Schools in Glenmaddy, Gort, and Portumna.

His election to Seanad Éireann is a validation of Michael Mullins' sterling record and experience as a public representative. IVEA looks forward to seeing Senator Mullins bringing his deep interest in education to the national stage, to campaign for adequate investment in education as the cornerstone of national recovery.

IVEA congratulates Senator Mullins on his success. We are proud of IVEA's nomination of and continued association with Senator Mullins.

## CDVEC to be student grants awarding authority

CDVEC

THE Minister for Education and Skills, Ruairí Quinn TD, recently announced that a single student grant awarding authority is to replace the existing 66 grant awarding bodies. This will come into effect for the 2012/13 academic year and reforms a student grant system that has been in operation in the State since 1968.



Jacinta Stewart  
CEO of CDVEC

City of Dublin VEC will be the new centralised authority following a competitive process carried out by an independent selection panel.

Minister Quinn said he has strongly supported calls to overhaul the student grants system and to move quickly to introduce this initiative which was enabled by the passage of the Student Support Act earlier this year. It also represents a concrete development in meeting the objectives set out in the action plan for the education sector on the Croke Park Agreement.

"While I am grateful to the VECs and local authorities currently operating the student grant function, the system is clearly overloaded resulting in late outcomes to applications and late payments for students," said Minister Quinn. "I expect the single authority to address these issues delivering a very

significant service enhancement to students", he concluded.

In congratulating CDVEC; the general secretary of IVEA, Michael Moriarty stated that "this decision brings some finality to a long running saga in regard to how student grants are processed. While we regret that our member VECs outstanding service over many years is to be terminated, IVEA is happy also that CDVEC, as the largest VEC in the country, is now to continue with an overhauled and reformed student grant scheme."

Mr Moriarty continued "This is some consolation for the vocational education sector. CDVEC has an outstanding professional record of service and this professionalism will also become very evident as the new grants scheme is rolled out."

Jacinta Stewart, CEO of CDVEC also welcomed the decision and said that "CDVEC recognises the enormous challenge involved and is fully committed to applying all its experience and resources as a public service body to creating an efficient and effective on-line application system."

CDVEC sees the Minister's decision as recognition of the strength and potential of the VEC sector to play a prominent and vital role in the delivery of education services across the country and it looks forward to this new opportunity with confidence."



Frank McDaid, then President of NPAVSCC, makes a presentation to IVEA General Secretary Michael Moriarty at the NPAVSCC Annual Congress in Donegal.

## Co Monaghan VEC Unveils Plans for its Education Campus



CO. MONAGHAN VEC  
COISTE GAIRMOIDEACHAIS CHONTAR MHEATHÁIN

On November 2009, County Monaghan VEC was selected by (then) Taoiseach Brian Cowen TD and his government to manage and oversee the procurement, planning and building of a multi-user Education Campus on the site of the former Military Barracks in Monaghan Town. This Campus will provide education at primary, post-primary and further education levels. Co. Monaghan VEC is the first education authority to obtain sanction from the Department of Education and Skills to manage a project of this scale on a "devolved pilot basis".



Left to right: Mr Brendan Ó'Duafaigh, Príomhoide Coláiste Oiriall, Mr Martin G. O'Brien, CEO, Co Monaghan VEC, Ms Mary Coughlan (then) Tánaiste and Minister for Education & Skills, Bishop Liam MacDaid, Bishop of Clogher, Mr Joe Ó Gallchóir, Príomhoide Gaelscoil Ultain.

The Campus will comprise:

- A 16 classroom all Irish Primary School for Gaelscoil Ultain
- A 400 pupils all Irish Post Primary School for Colaiste Oiriall
- An Institute of Further Education that will replace the existing PLC College
- Sports Hall – to be shared by all education users on the campus
- All necessary ancillary and storage facilities, administrative facilities and car park

Co Monaghan VEC hosted an official launch of the Education Campus Project

on 10th December 2010. This event was very well attended – despite the snow and severe freezing conditions! The audience was addressed by a range of key national, regional and local personnel, including: Ms Mary Coughlan, (then) Tánaiste and Minister for Education & Skills, Bishop Liam MacDaid, Bishop of Clogher, Jackie Crowe, Mayor of Co. Monaghan and Robbie Gallagher, Cathaoirleach of Monaghan Town Council.

All speakers emphasised the scale and importance of the project which will bring almost 2,000 people onto one site. It will

facilitate shared services and resources and increased administration efficiency & effectiveness. The audience were particularly impressed by the virtual tour of the Campus, which can be accessed at <http://www.monaghanVEC.ie/Monaghan-Education-Campus>.

Since the launch last December, full planning permission has been secured, and it is expected that building work will commence in June 2011. Co Monaghan VEC is confident that the new Campus will be successfully established within the allocated budget and timeframe.

## Michael D Addresses North Tipperary VEC Staff

NORTH Tipperary VEC recently had the privilege of having the Labour Party President and former TD, Dr Michael D Higgins, address its Education Conference in Nenagh. This was the fourth Education Conference organised by the VEC over the past seven years and over one hundred staff members attended on the night.

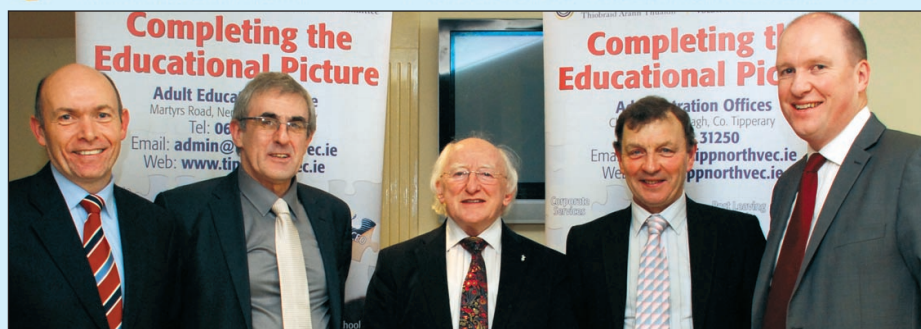
In his address Michael D Higgins highlighted the importance of education in the context of citizenship. He pointed out that current events have shown the longstanding assumption that the 'market was rational' is seriously flawed. He criticised current views that understanding how the larger ideas such as economics, politics, and democracy, can be understood only by the 'few elites who know what's best for the rest of us'.

He went on to praise the professionalism,



COISTE GAIRMOIDEACHAIS  
Thiobraid Árann Thuaidh

North Tipperary  
VOCATIONAL EDUCATION COMMITTEE



Left to Right: Noel Colleran, R&D Officer North Tipperary VEC; Michael McNulty, Principal Nenagh Vocational School; Michael D Higgins; William Kennedy, Chairperson North Tipperary VEC; David Leahy, CEO North Tipperary VEC.

commitment, and vocation of education practitioners who encourage and nurture the sense of wonder and creativity among their students. The answer, he claimed, to current challenges in education and across all aspects of life can derive from a Republic based on community values.

Dr Higgins concluded by painting a picture of an inclusive education provision that responds to the wonder of the human mind from cradle to old age.

This form of education would reflect the values of community and a Republic that we can all be proud of.

## Co Cavan VEC "ICT & Education" Seminar



COUNTY CAVAN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION COMMITTEE  
COISTE GAIRMOIDEACHAIS CHONTAE AN CHABHÁIN



Left to right: John Kearney, Chairperson ICT Steering Committee, Finbar Boyle, Principal Kilnaleck National School, Colm McEvoy, CEO, John McCabe, IT Administrator, Éanna Ó Brádaigh, Apple, Serena Prior, Principal Killygarry National School and Pat Duggan, Principal Greaghrahan National School.

ON March 25th 2011, Co. Cavan VEC held its "ICT & Education" seminar for all teaching staff.

While the Seminar presented an opportunity to launch the County Cavan VEC Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) - the primary focus of the seminar was the integration of ICT into teaching and learning on a daily basis.

The seminar was attended by circa 300 staff and Chairperson of the ICT

Steering Committee, John Kearney, opened by reflecting on the significant level of development in the integration of ICT into teaching and learning across the scheme. Co. Cavan VEC's CEO Colm McEvoy then addressed the key priorities in the successful implementation of the Strategy.

Dr Kevin Marshall, Guest speaker from Microsoft Ireland, provided very valuable inputs regarding development at international and

national level in the area of ICT and education. He was followed by Éanna Ó Brádaigh, Business Development Manager, Education, Apple Computing who delivered an insightful overview of educational developments worldwide using innovative ICT technologies to meet the needs of today's digital learners. The use of ICT methodologies in the delivery of third level courses provided the focus for the presentation by Professor Terri Scott, President of IT Sligo.



Participants from Co. Wicklow VEC at the Barrie Bennett Seminar on Co-operative Learning at Mount Wolseley, Co. Carlow

Exemplars of best practice included:

- St Bricin's College concentrated on aspects of their Laptop Initiative – the use of eBooks in particular.
- Breifne College focused on the use of ICT within the Physical Education Department, specifically focusing on the biometrics of movement, technique etc.
- Cavan Institute's use of ICT to support teaching and learning moved the focus to blended learning.

As the seminar neared its conclusion, Frank McGonagle, Managing Director, Wholeschool.tv, gave an overview of the development of a VLE for the Co. Cavan VEC. Finally Sean Sloane, Principal of St Patrick's Grammar School in Co. Down, shared his practical experiences of using a VLE in his own school.

## Minister launches Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector

**M**INISTER for Education and Skills, Mr. Ruairí Quinn TD, officially launched the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector on 19th April.

In his address, to an audience of education stakeholders, Minister Quinn said that the Forum “is a key objective of the Programme for Government for the education sector and I wanted it to get underway as quickly as possible.”

Professor John Coolahan (Chair), Dr. Caroline Hussey and Ms. Fionnuala Kilfeather were appointed as members of the independent Advisory Group. They will assess the various views and perspectives submitted including those of parents, patrons, teachers and the wider community.

The Minister called for submissions on a number of specific themes:

- Establishing parental and community demand for diversity
- Managing the transfer/divesting of patronage
- Diversity within a school or small number of schools in a locality

Referring to the context of the Forum, Minister Quinn noted “there are real questions to be answered about the match between our type of school provision, the demand for greater



*Minister for Education and Skills,  
Mr. Ruairí Quinn TD*

diversity and the make-up of the communities which need to be served.”

The Advisory Group will analyse and evaluate the submissions received. It will then convene a conference in the autumn to present its interim report.

The Minister noted that into the future “what we want are strong schools that provide good quality education to current and future generations of pupils.”

“Diversity and parental choice are enshrined in education legislation

so, with an increasingly diverse society and more choice demanded, Community National Schools represent a new departure in the options for parents and guardians of primary school children in Ireland.” said IVEA’s General Secretary, Michael Moriarty at the launch.

He added that “Community National Schools provide a multi-belief education programme. In doing so they make reasonable accommodation for the wishes of parents or guardians, within the school setting, delivering faith formation during the day. This commitment is an important and distinguishing feature of these new primary schools and provides an opportunity for the State to prepare children for the new multicultural Ireland.”

Commenting on VEC patronage of Community National Schools Michael Moriarty stated: “For too long the voice of the State sector has not been heard in the patronage debate at primary sector level. The development of Community National Schools will bring Ireland into line with other European countries; the State is developing its own publically managed sector, through the VEC network, where all children can be educated in one school, regardless of religion, gender, ability or socioeconomic background.”

## VECs as patron of a State sector in primary schooling

*By Dr Marie Griffin, CEO of Co. Dublin VEC*

**I**N December 2007, the then Minister for Education, Mary Hanafin T.D., invited County Dublin VEC to become patron of a new model of primary schooling. This new model - the Community National School - was established to allow for State schooling - through the VECs - at primary level for the first time (apart from the small number of Model Schools).

Ireland is unusual in having no State sector at primary level, largely because

of the influence of the Catholic Church which provided for primary education throughout the country to the historical satisfaction of the vast majority of the population. Community National Schools were established to cater for children of all faiths and none, according to the wishes of parents. A multi-belief programme “Goodness Me Goodness You”, incorporating elements of belief traditions (including Humanist) has been developed for the schools for religious education purposes.

In establishing a State sector at primary level, the then Minister was preparing for the possible devolution of some denominational schools to other patrons. There was, and is, a recognition that a growing number of parents do not wish to send their children to denominational schools and that some State model of common or community schooling at primary level is necessary into the future. The Catholic Church likewise recognises that change is necessary and has indicated a



COISTE GAIROIDEACHAIS CHONTAE ÁTHA CLIATH  
COUNTY DUBLIN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION COMMITTEE

willingness to consider some devolution of patronage in areas where parents wish it.

The VECs are the only State sector in schooling in Ireland. At second level, they directly manage their own schools and are joint patrons of Community and Comprehensive schools. As Paul Flynn recently observed in the Irish Times (April 12th, 2011), "virtually a huge majority of the top 30 fastest growing schools in the State are all in the VEC sector – (challenging) those lazy clichés about the VEC." VEC schools at second level are providing excellent educational opportunities, regardless of race, religion, culture or ability and they are committed to responding to local community need. VEC schools at primary level will do likewise.

Establishing VECs as patron at primary level allows for a continuity of patronage from the age of 4 to 18. It further allows for the building of education campuses where children can access primary and second level education and parents and adults can use the same community facilities for adult and continuing education. The provision of such facilities maximises facilities and resources, eases the transition from primary to second level and provides some comfort to parents who worry about second level school places. VECs can also, of course, provide for maximum efficiencies and provision of expertise in such areas as ICT, building, family learning, special needs, in-service etc.

To date, legislation has not been passed

to formally enable VEC patronage at primary level but the VECs already involved (Counties Dublin, Kildare, Meath) are acting as de facto patrons to the Community National Schools in their areas. They provide all the supports mentioned above and are managing the growth of the schools as they develop, with the full support of parents.

Ireland has need of a State sector of schooling at primary level to provide partnership, accountability, resource-efficiency and quality of education provision. The VEC sector has proven itself in all these areas at second level and to a limited extent to date at primary level. It is hoped that the Forum on Primary School Patronage will advocate an increased role for the VEC sector at primary level into the future.

## Pluralism in Ireland and Religion in VEC Schools

OVER the course of the last fifteen years, VEC schools have encountered an increasing number of educational and management issues arising from the increased diversity of their students.



By Dr. Barney O'Reilly

The national policy on inclusive education has resulted in the progressive inclusion of special needs students in our schools – irrespective of whether those needs are physical, learning or emotional. The DES has significantly supported this development through the allocation of Special Needs Assistants to schools and through a range of curricular provisions, such as the Junior Certificate Schools Programme.

Over the same period, 1995 to 2007, strong growth in the Irish economy resulting in a large influx of workers and their families from Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Africa, India and other major centres of population pressure. This has brought about a new kind of non-indigenous diversity in our schools.

The number of students with little or no English language competence burgeoned in our schools and this presented new challenges to teachers, principals and school managers – challenges for which they were ill prepared at the very beginning. Again, the DES developed a support resource (the Language Assistant) and, over time, this enabled schools to cope with this new kind of diversity.

Unfortunately, the new economic order has seen a contraction in the level of resources that the DES is allocating to schools to help them cope with this new diversity and, as a consequence, the capacity of schools to meet the needs of students with special needs has been appreciably diminished, with a consequent affect on student outcomes.

From the very outset, IVEA was particularly pro-active in ensuring that schools had the knowledge and tools to meet the language learning needs of students whose first language is other than English and, over a number of years, published four booklets to

support newcomer language learning in VEC settings.

This influx of the 'new Irish' brought not only language diversity to our schools. It also brought a wide range of other diversity – ethnic, cultural, religious and artistic. Many VEC schools saw their student population change over a short number of years from being homogeneously Irish, English speaking, white and catholic to being multiracial, multicultural and religiously diverse.

Even if there had not been an influx of people with other religions, the religious observance and commitment of the Irish had been changing steadily over the course of the previous quarter century and the newcomers merely accentuated this change. The time had come for Ireland to address the whole issue of how religion and religious difference is treated in the day-to-day life of the school and the relationships that exist between schools and religious/world views.

Once again, the State provided supports to schools to address the issue of cultural diversity when the NCCA published Intercultural Guidelines for Primary Schools (2005), and Post Primary Schools (2006). These publications provided practical guidance on how schools could give educational reality to the national policies to "... celebrate and recognise the normality of diversity in all areas of human life ..." and to "... promote equality and human rights and to challenge unfair discrimination." (NCCA website). In addition, the SDPI (School Development Planning Initiative) of the DES and the Equality Authority, in 2010, published Guidelines for Second Level Schools on Embedding Equality in School Development Planning. IVEA also made a significant contribution to addressing the cultural diversity issue when it published Guidelines for Conducting Equality Impact Assessments on IVEA and VEC Plans, Policies and Programmes in conjunction with the Equality Authority in 2007.

The religious diversity of today's school students presents the Irish school with new and unprecedented challenges. Furthermore, from a VEC perspective, there is evidence to suggest that 'international' families frequently choose to send

their children to the local VEC School for their second level education. So issues of language support, cultural difference and religious diversity are of particular significance in VEC schools.

Until the mid to late 90's, the range of religious diversity to be managed in Irish schools was limited to the relatively small number of students from protestant families and an almost negligible number of humanist, agnostic or atheist families. These families occasionally drew attention to their need to have their religious/nonreligious views taken into account in a school with a manifest Roman Catholic ethos.

Though the VEC legislation did not - and still does not - make any explicit reference to religion in the programme of the vocational school, the Department of Education, from the very beginning, provided VECs with guidelines on the whole matter of religious education in VECs schools.

The first set of general guidelines was issued, in 1931, to the thirty-eight new VECs. These guidelines (Department of Education Memorandum V.1) directed Committees to provide facilities for religious instruction and to incorporate such instruction into the general class timetable. According to Memorandum V1, VECs were to approach the local ecclesiastical authorities with regard to the actual teaching of religion and a 'reasonable' proportion of time was to be set aside for this purpose. Committees were not given any advice about what body might constitute 'the local ecclesiastical authorities'. Apparently this could be safely left to the discretion of the individual committees and their CEOs!

In response to concerns about the place of religion in VEC schools (raised stridently and controversially by the Professor of Education at St. Patrick's College - Rev. Fr. Martin Brennan) the initial guidelines were re-stated and expanded upon in a major set of guidelines issued to VECs in 1941, known as Memo.V.40. This memorandum directed that "with due regard to the rights of parents" (as required by the then recently adopted 1937 Constitution of the Free State), all VEC school pupils should receive instruction in the fundamentals of the Christian faith and that "... the teaching of every other subject be permeated with Christian charity ..." (p.22).

The most recent Department of Education statement on the issue of religion in VEC schools was that issued by the in 1974 (C.L. 73/74) – a statement that was repeated and further developed in 1979. (C.L. 7/79). These circular letters were published following a decision to establish Boards of Management for VEC schools in 1974 and the recognition of a new category of 'teacher of Religion' in VEC schools. The 1979 circular letter was issued on foot of an agreement between the Department, IVEA, the CEO's association, the teachers' union and the church authorities. This circular provided for the following:

- A recommendation for two hours per week religious instruction on the VEC school timetable
- Representation for the appropriate religious authority on the selection board for the post of religion teacher.
- The approval of the appropriate religious authority as to the "acceptability of the candidate for appointment as a religion teacher.
- The transfer of a religion teacher to other duties should s/he cease to be regarded as suitable for that purpose by the catechetical inspectorate.

- The inspection of the teaching of religion in Vocational schools – this to be the responsibility of the catechetical inspectorate.

The guidelines included in the 1979 circular, like those of the earlier guidelines, were not issued for the purpose of assisting schools to cope with religious diversity. Rather, they were intended to ensure that vocational schools included what was deemed to be an appropriate religious education in a system which was not directly controlled by the religious authorities. Diversity was to be catered to - and generally was- by respecting the right of parents who requested that their child be withdrawn from religious instruction classes. However, no guidelines were issued for the guidance of teachers, principals, boards of managements or VECs, about how the withdrawal of students from religion classes should be managed; this became a matter for the principal of the school to be decided at his/her discretion.

The guidance provided in the 1979 circular has not been updated and its provisions and those of the 1974 circular are included in the current IVEA Handbook for the guidance of VEC School Boards of Management.

In the meantime, the social fabric of Irish society has changed greatly. The circulars predate the 1998 Education Act and the Vocational Education (Amendment) Act, 2001. They also predate the introduction of new Religious Education syllabi for both the Junior Certificate and the Leaving Certificate, syllabi which are, theoretically at least, amenable to being taught successfully in the context of a number of faith traditions and from a faith-neutral perspective. With the introduction of these syllabi, DES established a Religious Education Inspectorate post and a support service for those teaching these syllabi. Of course, these initiatives are also under pressure from current expenditure cuts.

There is an urgent need for the VEC sector to review the arrangements currently place for the teaching of religion in our schools. The general issue of the role of religion in Irish schooling has become central to the national agenda because of the problems of responding appropriately to cultural and religious diversity at primary level. There is important work going on - particularly in Co. Dublin, in Meath and in Kildare - to demonstrate how VECs can assist in the development of models of educational provision, at primary level, that effectively respect the equality of all persons, irrespective of their religious belief or non belief; models of provision that vindicate the freedom of conscience and belief that the Irish Constitution guarantees to everyone resident in the State.

Given the important role that VECs have played, and continue to play, in catering sensitively to the diverse needs of learners and of society, it is important that all elements of the VEC sector should be pro-active and constructive in their submissions to the recently constituted Primary Patronage Forum that is seeking to explore how best to meet the educational challenges posed by increased diversity in 21st Century Ireland.

There remains also an urgent and pressing challenge in our existing schools. Recognising the role VEC schools play, as state schools, in meeting equally the needs of all students, we must review our present practices and develop policies appropriate to the new diversity that characterises our school populations. With this in mind, it is important that all VECs are represented at the 2011 John Marcus O'Sullivan Summer School this June, which will address this theme.

**Details of the 2011 John Marcus O'Sullivan Summer School are in Section 6 of this magazine.**



AN CHOMHAIRLE MHÚINTEOIREACHTA  
The Teaching Council

## The Teaching Council's Achievements and Future Priorities

By Áine Lawlor, CEO/Director of the Teaching Council

**T**HE Teaching Council, under the Teaching Council Act, 2001, is the professional standards and regulatory body for the teaching profession, similar to the Medical Council for doctors. Regulatory professional bodies protect the public interest and the reputation of a profession.

The Council has 37 members, 22 of whom are teachers and it is empowered by law to:

- set **standards** for entry to teaching
- keep a **register** of all teachers in Irish schools
- establish **professional education requirements** for teachers
- publish **codes of professional conduct and practice** for teachers
- deal with **complaints** about a teacher's fitness to teach.

Since its establishment in 2006, the Council has achieved the following:

### Register of Teachers

The Council has established the first Register of Teachers in the State. Each year, it processes approximately 7,500 applications for registration (primary, post-primary and further education)

Registration must be renewed annually as set out in the Teaching Council Act, 2001, and this is the norm for professional bodies. The Council's registration renewal fee of €90 funds the work of the Council in carrying out its functions.

### Regulating entry to the teaching profession

*The Teaching Council [Registration] Regulations* were published in 2009 and, for the first time, they bring uniformity to the requirements for entry to the profession. For example, they require that, from April 2013, all teachers wishing to be registered must

have a recognised teacher education qualification. The Regulations cater for the primary, post-primary and further education sectors.

The Council has recently published the *General and Programme Requirements for the Accreditation of Teacher Education Qualifications [Further Education]*. Heretofore, there was no requirement for a teacher education qualification in this sector. This document is available on [www.teachingcouncil.ie](http://www.teachingcouncil.ie).

### Assessment of qualifications

The qualifications of all applicants for registration, including applications from those who qualify outside of Ireland, are assessed to make sure they meet the regulations required for registration.

### Garda vetting

To date, the Council has arranged the vetting of approximately 30,000 teachers. It has also facilitated discussions and arrived at a broad agreement between all the major stakeholders in relation to the vetting of teachers who were in service prior to the Council's establishment in 2006 for whom vetting was not a requirement.

### Accrediting programmes of initial teacher education

There are 44 programmes of initial teacher education in Ireland, being delivered by 21 providers (colleges and universities). Prior to the establishment of the Council in 2006, there was no system in place for the professional accreditation of these programmes.

### Publishing Codes of Professional Conduct for Teachers

The Council published the *Codes of Professional Conduct for Teachers in 2007*. The Codes set out the standards of professional competence

and conduct which are expected of all registered teachers. This brings teaching into line with other professions in Ireland.

### Setting policy in relation to teacher education

The recently-published draft *Policy Paper on the Continuum of Teacher Education* sets out the Council's proposals with regard to initial teacher education, induction and continuing professional development. This is a significant document as the approach to teacher education has generally been fragmented with insufficient linkages between the different stages of the teacher's career.

### Next steps

Everything the Council does is governed by the Teaching Council Act, 2001. A number of functions in that Act have yet to be brought into effect by the Minister for Education and Skills. They relate to: induction into the teaching profession; probation; continuing professional development and fitness to teach (powers to investigate complaints made against teachers). The Council has been informed that its functions in the areas of teacher induction and probation will come into effect from September 2012.

The Council is awaiting commencement dates for:

- Section 30 of the Act, which makes registration a requirement for teaching in a State-funded teaching position
- Part 5 of the Act, which relates to its Fitness to Teach role, and
- Section 39 of the Act, which relates to Continuing Professional Development.

The Council looks forward to the commencement of all of its functions so that it will be in a position to realise its statutory role to the full.

**Change of details**

It is important that teachers have current personal data (e.g. name, address, email) recorded on the Register. Registered teachers wishing to apply to change or update their name, title, address, employment or qualification details on the register, should download and complete the relevant Change of Details form and return it to the Council with the necessary documentation as listed on the form. Forms may be downloaded from the homepage of [www.teachingcouncil.ie](http://www.teachingcouncil.ie).

**Teaching Council Contact Persons**

In 2009, registered teachers were invited to act as the contact person between the Council and the teaching staff in their schools. The aim is that one registered teacher from each school will be the contact person and will ensure that publications and other information are distributed to their colleagues. More than 1,300 schools have nominated a contact person for whom the Council has run a series of regional meetings over the 2010/2011 school year. It would like to thank all those teachers who attended these meetings and helped to make them such a success.

**A school may nominate a contact person by using the application form available via the homepage of [www.teachingcouncil.ie](http://www.teachingcouncil.ie), or request a form by emailing [education@teachingcouncil.ie](mailto:education@teachingcouncil.ie)**



*Drawing of the proposed new Dún Laoghaire VEC college building in Blackrock, Co Dublin.*

## Kerry Education Service Student Forum



**S**TUDENT Council members attend a Student Forum organised by Kerry Education Service (Co. Kerry VEC) at the beginning of each term. A Student Council gives students a voice and the opportunity to work in partnership with management and staff to improve their schools. Students, Principals and teachers in schools with democratic and effective Student Councils report that enormous benefits are gained through the work of the Student Councils.

In January 2011, the members of the Student Forum met again in the County Library in Tralee to discuss a range of issues that affect the lives of young people. Tommy O' Connor (County Librarian, Kerry Library) and Noirin O' Keeffe (Senior Executive Librarian, Kerry Library) facilitated an excellent debate on how the staff and Student Councils can collaborate to improve access to library facilities for second-level students. This was followed by an input from Mike Moriarty, Jigsaw Kerry on "Think Big",



*Student Council members from Castleisland Community College, Causeway Comprehensive School, Colaiste na Sceilge, Gaelcholaiste Charraí, Killarney Community College, Listowel Community College and Tralee Community College. (Missing from the photo are students from Killorglin Community College).*

which is about funding which young people can apply for in order to promote positive mental health.

The next meeting is already being planned for and it is proposed to be held in the chambers of Kerry County

Council. The students are looking forward to engaging with a local councillor on the lack of 'Youth Spaces' and facilities for young people. Kerry Education Service will continue to support the development of the Student Forum into the future.

## Occupational Health Service for Teachers – A Positive Experience

A recent survey carried out by Medmark Ltd., the providers of the Occupational Health Service for teachers, revealed high levels of satisfaction with the service from both teachers and employers perspectives. Medmark surveyed the experience and satisfaction levels of both employers referring and teachers attending for an occupational health assessment. The survey involved all Doctors employed in all of Medmark's surgeries and in the case of teachers the participants were chosen by reception staff to complete a confidential questionnaire immediately post assessment while all referring employers were contacted by e-mail directing them to the survey link.

The results of the survey were both positive and reassuring. 128 teachers were surveyed across the primary and post-primary sectors and while the majority of those surveyed admitted to feeling apprehensive prior to meeting with one of the Doctors, 97% felt that based on their experience of the service they would be less apprehensive if

they were asked to re-attend. The survey also revealed that over 98% of teachers found the Doctor to be courteous, professional, understanding and helpful.

While the response rate to the survey from employers was lower the feedback was very similar to that of teachers. Reference was made by referring employers to the speed, efficiency and professionalism of the service as well as 100% satisfaction with the clarity of the information and advice provided.

Overall 97% of teachers and 100% of employers rated the Medmark experience between good, very good and excellent with the highest percentage in the excellent category.

### Services Provided

Those who appoint and employ teachers have responsibilities for ensuring the health, safety, well being and education progress of students. They also have a duty under Section 8 of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 to "ensure, so far as

is reasonably practicable the safety, health and welfare at work of his or her employees". The Occupational Health Service was put in place as a supportive resource for teachers and employers. The service encompasses health management and incorporates pre-employment health assessments, medical assessments of fitness for work and ill health retirement assessments and appeals.

### Accessing the Service

Accessing the service could not be easier:

### Contact Details:

Medmark Occupational Health  
28 Penrose Wharf  
Penrose Quay  
Cork  
Phone 1890 235 711

Additional information on the Occupational Health Service for teachers may be found on [www.medmark4teachers.ie](http://www.medmark4teachers.ie) or the Department of Education and Skills website [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie)

## Employee Assistance Service is extended to Retirees for up to six months following Retirement

By Joe Doddy, Senior EAP Consultant, VHI



THE Employee Assistance Service (EAS) is a free and confidential counselling and support service for teachers, Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) and their family members to provide them with assistance in coping with a variety of issues. The service has recently been extended to include access for retired teachers and SNAs for up to six months following retirement. Teachers/SNAs may experience a mix of emotions when retiring and having access to the EAS during the weeks and months following retirement will help with the adjustment.

### What kind of services are available?

- Telephone Counselling – single sessions or short term structured counselling



- Face to Face counselling – up to six counselling sessions

Counselling is provided on issues such as health, relationships, addictions, bereavement, stress, conflict, critical incident and trauma.

### How do I contact the service?

It couldn't be simpler. The EAS is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year through: Freephone 1800 411 057 or Email : [eas@vhics.ie](mailto:eas@vhics.ie)

For additional information on the EAS just click on to the Department of Education and Skills Website, [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie) and follow the link provided.

## Qualifying and Upskilling FET Tutors Learning from Developments North of the Border

By Pat O'Mahony, IVEA

### Critical Role of Further Education and Training (FET) in Upskilling Workforce

**F**UTURE prosperity and social cohesion depends significantly on facilitating smart and sustainable economic growth yet a significant proportion of future jobs will be neither high tech nor towards the top end of the occupational ladder.

Essentially, the big upskilling challenge for Ireland is in the area of low and medium skills and qualifications, in further education and training (FET). Indeed, failure to address skill enhancement on the middle to lower rungs of the qualifications ladder could result in large sections of the population failing to benefit from the economic growth that those with high level skills might generate in the future.

The 2007 National Skills Strategy (NSS) envisaged that some 500,000 people need to move at least one step up the NFQ ladder and it is estimated that up to 84% of all upskilling envisaged in the NSS falls within the remit and competence of VECs.

### Need for Coherent Strategy for Qualifying and Upskilling FET Tutors

Notwithstanding this reality, we lack a coherent national strategy for qualifying and upskilling the thousands of FET tutors that work in schools, colleges and centers right around Ireland. Also, there seems to be a feeling, in some quarters, that trained second level teachers are automatically qualified to deliver FET programmes.

The 2010 OECD Review of Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Ireland<sup>1</sup> recommended the need to ensure that FET tutors and instructors have appropriate pedagogical competences and, more recently, the Teaching Council has established Programme Requirements for the Accreditation of Teacher Qualifications [Further Education]<sup>2</sup>.

Also, some years earlier, the DES published a number of circulars relating to the qualifications of FET tutors. For example, DES Circular Letter 32/92 set out the qualifications required for permanent appointments in VECs in the case of VPTP courses while Circular Letter 47/00 set out the qualifications required for permanent appointments in the following subject areas – beauty therapy, hairdressing, veterinary studies and arts administration. Subsequently, Circular Letter PPT 04/04 set out the requirements for appointments to complementary therapy teaching posts.

The problem here is that these circulars are focused on the whole matter of an employee's entitlement to permanent employment rather than on the competence of the tutor/teacher, per se, to provide a quality assured teaching/tutoring service to learners.

Given the acknowledgement that all workers need to upskill continuously, is there not an equally compelling case for ensuring that those who deliver much of this upskilling (FET tutors) are, in the first instance, appropriately qualified and subsequently have both their subject and pedagogical competence regularly updated? If so, is it not essential that we put in place a national strategy, and a plan for the implementation of the strategy, to ensure that all involved in the design, delivery and quality assurance of FET have the competences to undertake these tasks to the highest possible standard? Unfortunately, while this approach may seem axiomatic, there is no coherent national approach to ensuring that this is what actually happens.

Fortunately, the Teaching Council's Policy Paper on the Continuum of Teacher Education<sup>3</sup>, which provides a coherent framework for the selection, qualification, registration, induction and career-long upskilling of teachers, provides a road map around what needs

to be done here – though many who currently deliver FET programmes will never meet the standards required for registration with the Teaching Council as teachers unless the Council's remit is amended to give the Council responsibility for registering all with the demonstrated competences to design and deliver FET programmes. This brings us to the matter of what these competences should be and, to date, there has been no coherent attempt to document these in this jurisdiction. Why?

### Documenting the Competences that FET Tutors Require

While it may not be possible to define the effective FET tutor exclusively in terms of a narrow set of competences, as teaching is much more than a mere technical operation, a solid case can be made for setting out the core competences that all those who deliver FET should possess – at a minimum. Indeed, failure to set out such standards would seem to deny the need for accountability.

Surely, effective FET tutors will have subject knowledge sufficient to explaining the subject to their learners, will possess communication skills adequate to explaining the subject matter to learners, will be capable of implementing assessment procedures both for and of learning, will have a sound understanding of the principles that underpin adult learning, will be able to manage diverse groups of learners in classroom and workshop settings, will be able to use modern technology both to differentiate the teaching and individualise the learning, will have an understanding of and commitment to the whole notion of lifelong learning, will be reflective practitioners, will be able to create effective and stimulating opportunities for learners to acquire the knowledge, skills and competences they require to make the most of their lives, in the family, in the community and in the workplace; and so on.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/11/60/45399591.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.teachingcouncil.ie/\\_fileupload/TC\\_EdCtee/FE\\_TEQ\\_Guidelines\\_and\\_Criteria\\_31722325.pdf](http://www.teachingcouncil.ie/_fileupload/TC_EdCtee/FE_TEQ_Guidelines_and_Criteria_31722325.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.teachingcouncil.ie/\\_fileupload/TC\\_EdCtee/policypaper\\_brif\\_draft22dec2010\\_ck\\_56681186.pdf](http://www.teachingcouncil.ie/_fileupload/TC_EdCtee/policypaper_brif_draft22dec2010_ck_56681186.pdf)

### VEC s and FET Delivery

FET, as delivered by VECs in their schools and centers affects virtually every community in Ireland. The DES returns for 2010 show VECs catering to the needs of some 143,000 learners in 2010 but these figures do not comprehend those who participate in VEC self financing programmes. In fact, VECs probably cater to some 200,000 adult learners' annually.

Having regard to the extent of the FET programmes offered by VECs and the critical role that FET generally plays in upskilling the workforce, what might be done, in this jurisdiction, to qualify and upskill FET tutors without placing a further burden on the taxpayer at this time?

Firstly, a significant start to improving matters could be made if we could agree a set of national competences or standards that all FET tutors should possess, as early as possible, in their FET tutoring careers. In saying this, it is appreciated that such standards would only amount to a survival kit, sufficient to enable the tyro to do the job to a base-line standard and that there would be a need to put other interventions in place to ensure the career-long professional development of these tutors.

### Northern Ireland – Professional Standards for FET Teachers, Tutors and Trainers

In establishing such standards, we do not need to reinvent the wheel. Others have been down this road and there is much to learn from the work that has been done in Northern Ireland, where the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL), as a central plank in its Quality Improvement Strategy, Commissioned Lifelong Learning UK (NI)<sup>4</sup> to develop *The Northern Ireland Professional Standards for Teachers, Tutors and Trainers in the Lifelong Learning Sector*<sup>5</sup> – a task that entailed lengthy consultations with stakeholders and drew on similar work that had been undertaken in England, Scotland and Wales,

These standards were developed with the express purpose of ensuring that

the professional development needs of all teachers, tutors and trainers working in the further education, training and community/voluntary sectors are appropriately addressed. Prior to the publication of these standards in April 2009, there were no common standards for those delivering further education across Northern Ireland and, in effect, each provider set its own standards.

The standards published in 2009 clearly define what is expected in competence terms, of teachers, tutors and trainers in Northern Ireland, and they are being used to inform the development of qualifications for teachers, tutors and trainers in the lifelong learning sector. There are, of course other publications that could usefully inform the development of similar standards in this jurisdiction. For example, the Irish Teaching Council's recently published *General and Programme Requirements for the Accreditation of Teacher Education Qualifications [Further Education]* constitutes a very significant step towards standardising the qualifications and competences that our third level colleges provide to graduates seeking to qualify as further education teachers – qualifications that will provide these graduates with the academic basis for registering as FE teachers with the Teaching Council. However, as has been alluded to above, many with the subject competence to be excellent FET tutors will never be eligible for such registration, as they do not possess a third level degree.

A relatively little known piece of work that is highly relevant to this discussion is *Assuring World Class Competences for Trainers*,<sup>6</sup> published by the Trainers Network. This piece of work, pitched at level 7 on the NFQ proposes a set of core competencies for trainers and, as such, it provides a sound base for the development of training standards and programmes for training trainers.

Another very thoughtful piece of work that has the potential to contribute towards the development of an agreed schedule of competences is the 2009 Cedefop publication *Competence*

*Framework for VET Professions - handbook for practitioners*<sup>7</sup>.

### Northern Ireland – Use of Standards to Inform Development of Tutor Training

In Northern Ireland, the standards developed by Lifelong learning UK (NI) have informed the development of the Certificate in Teaching<sup>8</sup> course which is currently offered exclusively by the University of Ulster. This course, offered on a part time basis over the course of a single academic year, is intended to provide the 'beginner' with a base set of teaching competences. Furthermore, the course is built around a work-based learning model of teacher education, with course participants required to teach a minimum of four (4) hours per week. Thus much of the learning that participants undertake and much of the assessment of that learning revolves around classroom practice. To support the work based learning each trainee is supported in the school/centre by a suitable mentor. These school-based mentors are trained and supported in a variety of ways by the University of Ulster; also, each school based mentor is supported by a university nominated mentor, thus ensuring the overall coherence of the programme.

The Certificate in Teaching is a rigorously developed and assessed course and, while it is a standalone qualification in its own right, it also constitutes the first year of the Post Graduate Certificate in Education (Further Education) [PGCEFE], a course also offered exclusively by the University of Ulster and underpinned by the professional standards for teachers in the lifelong learning sector developed by Lifelong learning UK (NI) – see above. The PGCEFE is the pedagogical qualification required for registration as an FE teacher with the General Teaching Council of Northern Ireland [GTC (NI)]. As in the case of the Certificate in Teaching, much of the learning is work based and participants must teach a minimum of eight (8) hours per week for the duration of the course. Interestingly, this course is also delivered south of the border at Cavan Institute of Further Education.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.lluk.org/northern-ireland/#/northern-ireland>

<sup>5</sup> <http://issuu.com/lifelonglearninguk/docs/northern-ireland-professional-standards-for-teachers?mode=embed&layout=http%3A%2F%25>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.trainersnetwork.ie/tnfullrep.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.opf.fi/download/111332\\_Competence\\_framework\\_for\\_VET\\_professions.pdf](http://www.opf.fi/download/111332_Competence_framework_for_VET_professions.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.socsci.ulster.ac.uk/education/CIT\\_Flyer.pdf](http://www.socsci.ulster.ac.uk/education/CIT_Flyer.pdf)

### Department for Employment and Learning (NI) Issues Circular on Qualifications to Teach in FET Settings

Following on from the publication of *The Northern Ireland Professional Standards for Teachers, Tutors and Trainers in the Lifelong Learning Sector*<sup>9</sup>, the Department for Employment and Learning (NI), in November 2009, published *Circular Number FE12/09*<sup>10</sup> and in doing so revised the qualifications required to teach in further education in Northern Ireland. Thereafter, from November 2009, new entrants to teaching in Institutions of Further Education, whether part time or full time, who do not hold a Bachelor of Education Degree or a Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) are required to complete successfully the Certificate in Teaching (see above) within a year of commencing teaching and the PGCEFE (see above) over the course of the next two years of teaching.

There would seem to be distinct

benefits in this jurisdiction undertaking a robust review of the eligibility criteria for teaching in FET programmes and subsequently publishing a single DES Circular setting out the requirements to teach in FET settings. There need not be just a single eligibility requirement; it might be appropriate to set different requirements for different FET programmes. The main thing would be to set out all requirements in a coherent form, in a single document, so that anyone seeking to discover what requirements are necessary may easily locate them. The publication of any such 'unified' circular should incorporate the withdrawal of all existing circulars governing entitlement to teach in FET programmes.

In particular, the proposed circular should clearly address three principal issues: general education, specialist subject (the subject that the teacher/tutor proposes to teach) expertise and pedagogical competence. The Northern Ireland circular addresses

these three areas in clear-cut and easily understandable terms. In doing so, it provides an interesting degree of latitude when it comes to the matter of general education and subject experience requirements - a latitude that is essential when it comes to determining eligibility to teach in the FE sector, where a third level degree is, oftentimes, not appropriate to determining such eligibility.

For example, many vocational skills are not covered by degree programmes and those most suited to providing training in these skills are unlikely to be third level graduates. Consequently, the NI circular specifies that, instead of a third level degree, 'three years relevant industrial, professional or business experience' and a 'qualification in the specialist area in which the applicant is to teach', provided such qualification is at 'Level 5 or above on the National Qualifications Framework' (roughly in line with a level 6 qualification on the Irish NQF) is sufficient to meet

<sup>9</sup> <http://issuu.com/lifelonglearninguk/docs/northern-ireland-professional-standards-for-teache?mode=embed&layout=http%3A%2F%25>

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.delni.gov.uk/qualifications\\_required\\_to\\_teach\\_in\\_institutions\\_of\\_further\\_higher\\_education.pdf](http://www.delni.gov.uk/qualifications_required_to_teach_in_institutions_of_further_higher_education.pdf)

## South Tipperary VEC Adult Learning Festival on a Winning Streak



Coiste Gairmoideachais Thiobraid Árann Theas  
Seirbhís Oideachais den Chéad Scoth  
South Tipperary Vocational Education Committee  
Provides a Quality Education Service

THE National Adult Learners' Festival 2011 was recently launched by South Tipperary VEC in CTI Senior College, The Mall, Clonmel. RTÉ and the Director of AONTAS, Berni Brady, travelled from Dublin to film the South Tipperary VEC festival as part of the 'Dream Maker' segment on the National Lottery's Winning Streak TV game show. Each week, one lucky player gets to spin the Dream Maker Wheel at National Lottery supported project venues. The National Lottery provides funds to AONTAS, the National Adult Learning Organisation, for the Adult Learners' Festival.

The festival got underway outside the Senior College with a colourful release of balloons to the rousing drum rolls of two talented drummers from Banna Chluain Meala. Inside, Eileen Condon, Adult Education Officer, welcomed everyone and spoke of the many qualities of adult education: creativity, informality, and the value of the life experience of adults as learners. Berni Brady, the Director of AONTAS, said she

was greatly impressed with the range of learning on display. She also talked about the benefits of adult learning: people who learn are "happier and healthier". Also in attendance were



Berni Brady, Director of AONTAS, speaking at the launch of the National Adult Learners' Festival 2011. Also in the photo is Eileen Condon, South Tipperary VEC Adult Education Officer.

Fionuala McGeever, CEO of South Tipperary VEC and Cllr. John Fahey, Chair of the VEC.

A wide selection of adult learning options and demonstrations were showcased on the day along with an information stand set up by STAGES, the Adult Educational Guidance Service:

- Dog grooming demonstrations by the learners on the FETAC Level 5 course in Animal Welfare.
- Learners from the FETAC Level 5 Art course at the Senior College displayed some Art from their portfolios.
- Learners on a FETAC Level 3 Digital Photography class had an exhibition of their photos.

RTÉ game show host, Geri Maye interviewed VEC learner, Emma Dowley about her successful journey in adult learning from learner to co-business owner of an accounts service for small businesses in South Tipperary. Footage of the festival was shown that night on Winning Streak and if you missed it, you can see it on [www.tippsouthVEC.ie](http://www.tippsouthVEC.ie)

the general education and subject specific qualifications. Meeting these requirements is also sufficient to gain admission to the University of Ulster's PGCEFE and successful completion of this course provides graduates with qualified teacher status, subject to successful registration with the General Teaching Council NI.

### Registration of FET Teachers

If the DES was to publish a single coherent circular letter setting out the requirements to teach in FET programmes, it might also be a good idea to consider putting in place a structure and process to facilitate the registration of all FET teachers/tutors. Currently, in this jurisdiction, only third level graduates with a PGDE are eligible for registration with the Teaching Council and, north of the border, only those who possess a PGCEFE are eligible for registration with the GTC (NI) – though there is an expectation that the GTC (NI) will be given responsibility for the registration of all FE teachers in due course. There would also seem to be a good case for putting in place a structure and process for registering all FET teachers/tutors in this jurisdiction. The Teaching Council's new policy on the Continuum of Teacher Education highlights the need to treat teacher education as a career long project and not just to confine it to a pre-service activity. In this regard, it is interesting to note that the University of Ulster has a Post Graduate Diploma in Further and Higher Education, which builds on the PGCEFE and the entry level Certificate in Teaching, and is designed to provide those working in further and higher education with the opportunity to develop their pedagogical skills to an advanced level. This course is ideally suited to upskilling those delivering further education programmes – some five (5) to 10 years into their teaching careers.

In the North, the possibility of satisfactory completion of the Diploma course becoming a condition for FE teachers renewing their registration with the GTC (NI), at a particular point in their teaching careers, is already being contemplated - thus ensuring that teachers continue to upskill rather than taking the position that they are qualified teachers and so need to undertake no further learning to ensure their suitability to teach

in a rapidly changing world. These kinds of diploma courses can be used to facilitate FET tutors acquiring the skills and competences essential to renewing and updating their teaching competences by completing a series of modules over a number of years and there would appear to be merit in the DES, in consultation with the FET stakeholders, exploring the possibilities for doing something similar in this jurisdiction. Again, in the North, it is not simply a matter of the University of Ulster offering some kind of standard diploma course, similar to what it might offer to second level teachers. The DEL is proactive in specifying the knowledge, skills and competences that it wants such courses to provide to those who undertake these courses. Implicit in this specification is the acknowledgement that pedagogy and andragogy and not the same discipline. Integrated Continuous Professional Development for FET Tutors to Masters' Level.

The Post Graduate Diploma course offers progression to two masters' programmes at the University of Ulster – the Masters in Education and the Masters in e-Learning. Indeed, those who already possess the post graduate diploma are able to complete the Master's programme with just one further year of study. Both of these master's courses build on the work already undertaken in both the post graduate certificate and the post graduate diploma courses and the new Masters in e-Learning course is specifically geared towards providing practicing FET tutors with the skills to use modern technology to maximum effect to both differentiate teaching/instruction and to individualise learning.

Given the extent to which FET programmes will more and more involve blended and self directed learning this master's programme is particularly relevant to improving the learning outcomes for FET learners.

### Concluding Remarks

In the North, they are well on the way to providing a coherent, quality assured ladder of integrated qualifications, one building on the other, which provides those delivering FET with the capacity to, in the first instance, acquire the competences relevant to

teaching in a variety of FET settings and, subsequently, over the course of their teaching careers to update those skills through participation in post graduate courses. Furthermore, using an integrated combination of the DEL circular governing eligibility to teach in further education programmes and the requirements for registration as FET teachers with the GTC (NI), they have incentivised FET tutors to acquire appropriate teaching qualifications at the beginning of their teaching careers. Assuming that they go down the road of making the renewal of registration with the GTC (NI) contingent on FET teachers undertaking specific continuous professional development, they will also, in due course, incentivise FET teachers to upskill over the course of their careers – without the State having to invest large amounts in such upskilling.

Might a similar approach work south of the border? There would seem to be no obvious reason why it would not. Of course, there are other matters that we would need to address in tandem such as the establishment of a salary scale and, maybe, a career path for FET tutors. Also, the need for some kind of registration process for all FET tutors would seem desirable.

The issues raised in this paper need far more attention than it has been possible to devote to them in this necessarily discursive piece. However, in the opinion of this writer they merit serious work on the part of the DES, in consultation with all the FET stakeholders before a clear policy direction is established.

Evan a cursory examination of developments in Northern Ireland leaves one convinced that the DES needs to take a lead in this matter and that, where national standards are established for FET tutors working for VECs and other state providers, these standards must also be imposed on all private providers – otherwise one is likely to be left with a two tiered service.

It would be nice to think that the debate has been commenced and that the prior learning of those north of the border could shorten our journey towards improving an area of education that is critical to facilitating both prosperity and social cohesion.



## New Headquarters for the Irish Vocational Education Association

**T**HE end of an era is nigh as IVEA is nearing a move away from McCann House after a 25 year residency. The Association will be relocating to a new Administrative & Training Centre at Piper's Hill in Naas, Co. Kildare. This new headquarters which is nearing completion is being constructed by Co Kildare VEC for the IVEA.

Commenting on the relocation of the body's administrative headquarters, IVEA General Secretary Michael Moriarty says, "The IVEA had for some time been seeking a location for a new national training and administrative centre. We have plans to assist the VEC sector in developing a comprehensive training programme

at the national training centre in the new facility, and our current facilities in Dublin have simply not been adequate. Due to the foresight and commitment of Co Kildare VEC and its CEO Sean Ashe, it has been possible for the IVEA to establish a new state-of-the-art administrative and training facility at Piper's Hill."

## Government for National Recovery 2011-2016: Education Objectives

### Main points of relevance

Drawing from the top performing education models like Finland for examples and ideas on how to reverse Ireland's decline in educational outcomes of the past few years.

### Early Childhood Care and Education

To maintain the free pre-school year in Early Childhood Care and Education and to invest in a targeted early childhood education programme for disadvantaged children e.g. young Ballymun project.

### Empowering Schools to Improve Standards

- Prioritising the recruitment, training and support of the highest calibre of teachers.

## AT A GLANCE

- To give greater autonomy and freedom to school principals and BOMs by devolving more responsibility locally and in allocating and managing staff.
- Require schools to draw up five year development plans for their schools and individual teachers.
- Administrative functions, relating to maintenance, school building projects and coordination of support services currently carried out by

principals will be devolved locally.

### Improving Outcomes

The system for evaluating schools will be reformed so parents have access to more information when choosing a school for their family. A new system of self-evaluation will be introduced, requiring all schools to evaluate their own performance year on year and publish information across a wide range of criteria.

### Making Literacy a National Cause

- Every school will be required to have a literacy action plan, with demonstrable outcomes. Responsibility for achieving these outcomes will be vested in the school principals, who will also

receive continuous professional development to support the implementation of the strategy.

- Local authorities will be supported in developing "Right To Read" campaigns involving community supports for literacy, from within existing budgets such as more spacious social housing, longer opening hours for libraries, homework clubs and summer camps that improve literacy through sport and games.

### 21st Century Schools

Greater use of online platforms will be made to offer a wide range of subjects and lessons online, and to enable schools to "share" teachers via live web casts. These online lessons will be made available through a new Digital School Resource, bringing together existing resources from National Council for Curriculum Assessment, Department of Education and Skills and other sources as a cost effective means of sharing expertise between schools.

### Building Schools for the Future

- Shared Educational Campuses will be the preferred model for future development of educational infrastructure.
- Will negotiate the transfer of school infrastructure currently owned by 18 religious orders cited in Ryan Report at no extra cost to the State.

### Delivering Equity in Education

- Examine and create innovative ways in which teenagers at risk of leaving the school system can stay connected with learning and education, for example through use of ICT-based distance learning and projects such as iScoil.
- Encourage schools to develop anti-bullying policies and in particular, strategies to combat homophobic bullying to support students.

### Patronage

- Initiate a time-limited Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector to allow all stakeholders including parents to engage in open debate on change of patronage in communities where it is appropriate and necessary.

- The Forum's recommendations will be drawn up into a White Paper for consideration and implementation by Government to ensure that the education system can provide sufficiently diverse numbers of schools, catering for all religions and none.
- Move towards a more pluralist system of patronage at second level, recognising a wider number of patrons.

### Third Level Reform

- Initiate a time-limited audit of level 8 qualifications on offer and learning outcomes for graduates of these courses.
- Introduction of radical reform in third level institutions to maximise existing funding, in particular reform of academic contracts and will encourage greater specialisation by educational institutions.
- Merge the existing accreditation authorities, National Qualifications Authority, FETAC and HETAC to increase transparency.

### Lifelong Learning

- Lifelong learning, community education and vocational training for jobseekers will be a high priority.
- Expansion of training options for jobseekers across the VEC, further and higher education sectors to facilitate up-skilling for the labour force.
- Addressing the widespread and persistent problem of adult literacy through the integration of literacy in vocational training and through community education.
- Within the first 100 days of government – resource a Jobs Fund which will among other things, provide resources for an additional 15,000 places in training, work experience and education opportunities for those who are out of work and an expansion of the eligibility for the back to education allowance.

### Labour Market Policy

- Development of a new graduate and apprentice internship scheme,

work placement programmes and further education opportunities for our young unemployed providing an additional 60,000 places across a range of schemes and initiatives.

- Provision of a range of initiatives to increase access to further higher level education for the unemployed.
- Literacy and basic workplace skills will be made a national priority, with literacy training incorporated into wider variety of further education and training.
- 30,000 additional training places across the education and training system to be distributed in line with the recommendations of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs.

### National Employment and Entitlements Service

- Replacement of FÁS with a new National Employment and Entitlements Service so that all employment and benefit support services will be integrated in a single delivery unit managed by the Department of Social Protection.
- This integrated service would provide a "one stop shop" for people seeking to establish their benefit entitlements; looking for a job; and seeking advice about their training options.
- It will process citizen entitlements such as supplementary welfare allowances, higher education grants and welfare allowances.
- It will manage as much as possible means testing for State entitlements.
- It will also be responsible for employment referral and training supports provided by FÁS.
- This service will offer users a higher level of personalised employment counselling, with more frequent face-to-face interviews. Those on the live register who are identified as being most at risk of long-term unemployment will receive priority treatment for more intensive support.

- It will ensure active case management for people in need of assistance.

## TPS Update

### VEC co-operation with Procurement Initiatives to yield significant savings

**T**HROUGH their openness to change and effective co-operation with the National Procurement Service, VECs are set to make significant savings in Energy and other key goods and services.

All 33 VECs have taken the unprecedented step of signing up to energy contracts issued by the National Procurement Service following its competition for the supply of electricity and natural gas to the VEC Sector.

Through maximising economies of scale, the new contracts are expected to offset the recent rise of up to 20% in energy prices since 2010 as well as providing additional significant savings through tariff corrections.

The new VEC contracts commence the beginning of May 2011 for 1 year, at which point the National Procurement Service will return to the market to seek best VFM for VECs. In addition to savings, cooperation with the NPS assures VECs of compliance with procurement regulations and EU directives as well as meeting government targets regarding green energy requirements.

Viridian Energy Ltd (trading as Energia) won the electricity competition and two



of the lots for natural gas (SBU and MBU tariffs) while Vayu Ltd won the third gas tariff (FVT).

VECs have also begun participating in a new **stationary contract** won by Codex Ltd, a wholly Irish-owned company. This contract offers significant savings on a large range of core stationary supplies. Separate competitions for the supply of paper and consumables are also nearing completion and finalised contracts are expected shortly. It is also expected that the National Procurement Service will focus soon on the procurement of managed print services.

Having a central IVEA liaison between VECs and the NPS has proven effective in implementing procurement initiatives to date, ensuring the necessary and prompt exchange of data, information and consent between the organisations.

Other NPS frameworks open to VECs include Janitorial supplies, Advertising and Printing (jobs below €25K).

Facilitating **SME involvement** in procurement remains a focus for all public sector stakeholders. In addition to Circular 10/10, the recent NPS *Excellence in Public Procurement* Seminar, held in Dublin Castle, focussed on how public bodies can assist SMEs by bringing clarity and consistency to how they approach the key areas of supplier accessibility, criteria, instructions and feedback

Other developments in the sector include the establishment of **VEC Procurement Network** which aims to support VECs in implementing greater efficiencies and cost savings as well as standardising procurement policies across the Sector. Feedback from its first meeting in February 2011, which focused on VEC/NPS cooperation and national frameworks, was very positive. The Network will meet again on May 24th, where Procurement for Construction Projects and corporate procurement will comprise the main agenda items.

For further information on any of the above, please contact [g.moore@ivea.ie](mailto:g.moore@ivea.ie). The new National Procurement Service website is [www.procurement.ie](http://www.procurement.ie)



Cohort 2 of the training programme in Instrumental Intelligence with the renowned Canadian academic, Professor Barrie Bennett

IN April 2008 the IVEA commenced negotiations with national bodies representing vocational providers in other EU countries, with a view to establishing a new Europe wide representational and lobbying body for vocational education and training. The organisation EUproVET was officially launched in September 2008 and a Deed of Incorporation was signed on 24th April 2009 in Amsterdam.

IVEA is one of five founder members of EUproVET – four ordinary members (Netherlands, Ireland, Finland and UK) and one associate member (Spain). Denmark, Lithuania and France have since joined EUproVET.

The mission of the association is to voice the interests of providers of vocational education and training and adult education within the European Union and to reach common European goals at European policy level in the member states of the European Union and European countries which do not form part of the EU.

In the development of European VET policy to date providers of VET and Adult Education were not adequately represented at the higher political levels in Europe due to the lack of a solid and representative organisation. However, the ambitions of political Europe regarding European Vocational Education and Training cannot be achieved without creating common conditions for VET provision and the active involvement of the providers of VET and Adult Education Institutions, schools and colleges from all the member states of the EU.

EUproVET is now recognised as a representational platform for European VET providers through which they can contribute to the European Agenda for vocational education and training at the highest level. It is a direct voice whereby VET providers in schools and colleges throughout Europe can contribute to effective and feasible VET policy development for implementation in a unified manner across Europe.

For the first time VET providers in institutions, schools and colleges throughout Europe have the possibility



of strong representation at European Level to voice their interests and reach common European goals which can be implemented across all EU member states.

EUproVET now contributes to the European VET Agenda by

- Providing the European Labour Market with a skilled and highly qualified labour force
- Contributing to social inclusion, from both the social and economic perspectives
- Contributing to lifelong learning
- Creating smooth pathways to higher stages of education
- Contributing to an open European Vocational Education Training Area.

EUproVET works in collaboration with EfVET and other representative VET organisations at EU-level.

EUproVET also offers opportunities to VET providers to enhance their international profile by sharing knowledge and innovations and promoting mutual mobility of students and staff between providers in different European countries. It assists in building project based consortia and engages in a broader screening of European funding opportunities to enable VET schools and colleges work together on common projects across international boundaries.

EUproVET also offers members the opportunity to add a strong international dimension to their education in order

to meet the demands of the labour market for internationally orientated entrepreneurs and employees.

In order to involve VET providers and other stakeholders in the challenges Europe is facing with respect to VET and labour market policy, the partners of the EUproVET have planned and will continue to plan several conferences, Peer Learning Activities (PLA's) and other meetings on the strategic level as well as on the operational level. Policy makers meet at regular intervals to define strategy towards the implementation of EU policies. Experts have met in PLA's around the themes of mobility and ECVET/EQF. The most recent PLA meeting was held in Helsinki at the beginning of April on ECVET.

Providers from member states are encouraged to engage in these conferences, PLA's and other European meetings to share their expertise to develop strategies which can feed into the development of VET policy at EU political levels.

The work of EUproVET is overseen by the EUproVET Council and the EUproVET Executive Council.

More detailed information on EUproVET is available on its website [www.euprovvet.eu](http://www.euprovvet.eu).

Finally EUproVET will hold its second Annual Conference in Brussels on the 15th June in the Hotel Bristol Stephanie in Brussels. VECs are encouraged to send representatives and should book through IVEA. The conference will give an opportunity for Irish VET providers to engage with their European colleagues in an exchange of innovative ideas and develop a clearer understanding of their role as FE providers in the European agenda for VET.

**The conference cost is €175 and the cost of the Hotel for the night of June 15th is €140 per single room including breakfast.**

**Please inform IVEA Head Office if you are attending the Conference as approved places are limited.**

# The Labour Relations Commission's Workplace Mediation Service

By Seamus Doherty, LRC.



**T**HE function of the Labour Relations Commission is to promote good industrial relations in Ireland and to provide effective and appropriate dispute resolution services in that regard. The Commission constantly reviews the services it provides and the Workplace Mediation Service was developed as a consequence of the perception of a growing need for a more informal and quick alternative dispute mechanism for Irish workplaces.

## What is the Workplace Mediation Service?

Workplace mediation provides for a prompt, confidential and effective remedy to workplace conflicts, disputes and disagreements. It is particularly suited to disputes involving individuals or small groups of workers who find themselves having to deal with situations which may involve:

- Interpersonal differences, conflicts, difficulties in working together;
- Breakdown in a workplace relationship;
- Issues arising from a grievance and disciplinary procedure;
- Rebuilding a relationship after a formal dispute has been resolved;
- Issues around communications and consultation.

## How does Workplace Mediation work?

Mediation provides an opportunity for those involved to address their issue, explore options and reach a workable outcome through a mutually agreeable course of action. The process is flexible and can be adapted depending on individual situations but essentially involves giving everyone concerned an opportunity to give their side of the story and to work with the other party to find a way towards a solution. The process may involve a mix of joint meetings or meetings with the mediator alone. The entire process is focussed on everyone involved being comfortable with the process and on working towards potential solutions. Some key principles governing the process include:

- **It is voluntary** – it can only take place on the basis that all sides are agreeable to participate. Anyone can withdraw at any stage if they want to;
- **It is confidential** – the process is private and confidential to the parties unless otherwise agreed. This gives everyone confidence to express exactly how they feel and confidence to explore solutions without prejudice;
- **It is solution focussed** – the whole object of the exercise is to reach a workable and mutually agreeable solution to the issue;
- **It is impartial** – the mediator does not take sides.

## What are the benefits of Workplace Mediation?

- It is an opportunity to resolve a problem in an informal non-adversarial way;

- The resolution of the issue remains in the control of the individuals concerned. They will be involved in the development of the solution, a solution is not imposed. As a result the outcome is likely to be better and longer lasting;
- It creates a safe place for all sides to have their say and be heard;
- It has the potential for a high success rate and positive outcomes where the parties are genuinely committed to a resolution;
- It very much focuses on the future working relationships of those involved.

## What happens if a dispute remains unresolved following Mediation?

The service is focussed on assisting parties to deal effectively with issues that arise in the workplace. There is no obligation on any party to commit to any further procedure in the event that the problem remains following mediation. It is worth reiterating that where everyone concerned is committed to the process and to trying to resolve the issue, mediation has a very good chance of success. There is no report made by the mediator to either party or to the employer.

## The LRC experience so far

We deliver a workplace mediation service across every sector of Irish workplaces, involving small and large organisations, individuals and small groups of employees in both the public and private sectors, and involving both relatively straightforward and complex issues.

## Our people

Our staff are skilled and professionally trained. They are experienced in all aspects of industrial relations in the workplace, including dispute resolution, delivery of training and advice on best practice generally.

## How do I apply for Mediation?

Ideally, all applications for mediation should be made on a joint basis. The process works best when both parties have a desire to resolve an issue and have jointly agreed that mediation is the best means to secure that resolution. Notwithstanding this, the service will attempt to secure agreement to participate where only one party has sought the intervention. The process is however voluntary and the Commission does not compel participation.

## Contact Details

mediation@lrc.ie

phone nos 01 6136756/01 6136740

## Explosion in the number of claims being made to Employment Law Forums

**E**MPLOYEES making claims to employment law forums are currently facing considerable delays in having their claims heard.

### The Employment Appeals Tribunal (the "EAT")

- Predominantly deals with unfair dismissal claims.
- From the date of receipt of the claim form - unfair dismissal claims are taking approximately 72 weeks to be heard in Dublin. Unfair dismissal claims are taking approximately 50-70 weeks throughout the rest of the country.
- Redundancy Payments legislation claims are currently taking approximately 48 weeks to be heard.

### Rights Commissioners

- Experiencing delays of approximately six months.
- There has been an explosion in the number of referrals under the Payment of Wages Acts.
- The service is currently dealing with 1,500 cases a month.

- Legal actions being brought by employees opposing attempts to retire them have mushroomed in number recently.

### The Equality Tribunal

- Employment equality related complaints submitted to the Tribunal are taking approximately two years to be heard by an Equality Officer.
- If both parties agree to mediation they may receive an earlier date for a mediation hearing.

### The difficulty for employers

Employers are now facing the difficulty of defending claims taken by employees concerning matters which took place some considerable time before the claim comes on for hearing. As a result it is now more important than ever that employers keep detailed records and statements which relate to the facts of any potential claim or any other contentious matters, with a view to being in a position to defend any claim taken against them in the future.

### The difficulty for employees

Employees now also have to wait an extensive time period before they have any prospect of being compensated or being awarded re-instatement or re-engagement as a consequence of their dismissal; and they may well have mitigated their loss by securing another job before their claim is dealt with as the Unfair Dismissals Acts only provide for compensation based on an employee's loss of earnings.

### Need for reform?

A range of proposals are currently under consideration to deal with the delays:

- The amalgamation of the Labour Relations Commission with the National Employment Rights Authority;
- Designating certain Rights Commissioners to deal solely with payment of wages claims.
- The use of mediation or arbitration as Alternative Dispute Resolution mechanisms in claims taken before the EAT.

## EUpVET Meeting Takes Place in Cork

**A** meeting of EUpVET, the European Providers of Vocational Education and Training, of which IVEA is a member, took place in Cork City from 12th to 14th May 2011. The meeting was the organisation's last, prior to their second annual Conference which will be held in Brussels on 15th June 2011. The delegates, hailing from the UK, Finland, Netherlands, France, and of course, Ireland, were given a warm welcome by Michael Moriarty, General Secretary of IVEA, Ted Owens, CEO of City of Cork VEC, and Joan Russell, CEO of County Cork VEC. They were also welcomed to Cork by Cllr

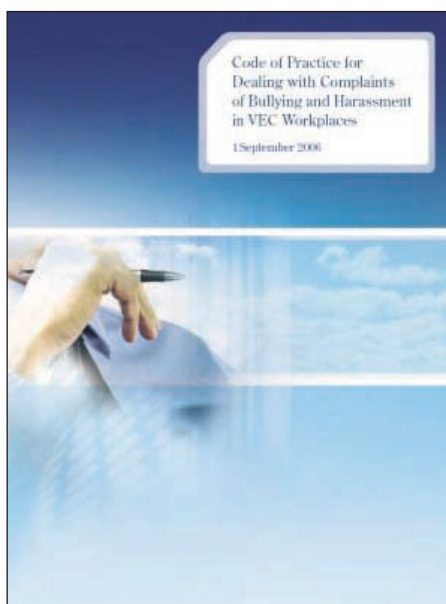
Noel O'Connor, President of IVEA, and Cork County Cllr Gerry Kelly. Besides successfully completing their planned order of business, the delegates were very impressed by their visit to Cork College of Commerce and the very fruitful exchange of information and ideas with Principal Helen Ryan. There was time for some socialising as well. The visitors enjoyed the best of Irish cuisine and explored all around Cork City and County, culminating with a particularly memorable visit to the Jameson Distillery in Midleton. All in all, a successful meeting, and a very enjoyable visit to Cork!



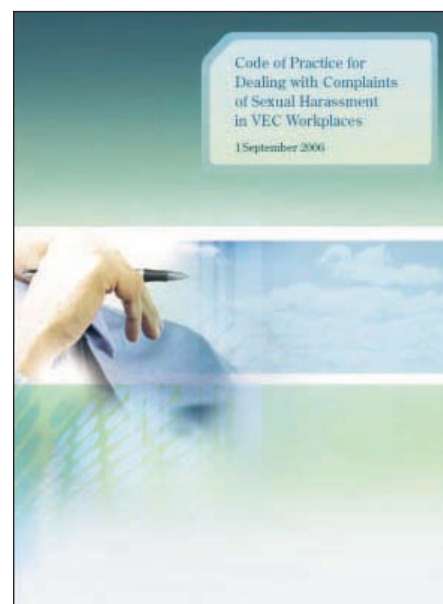
Helen Ryan, Principal of Cork College of Commerce, exchanges views with EUpVET delegates.



Attending a dinner hosted by County Cork VEC: Left to right: Eric M'Farredj (RENASUP France), IVEA FE Officer John Ryan, Chairperson of Co Cork VEC Cllr Gerry Kelly, Manfred Polzin (MBO-Raad Netherlands), President of IVEA Cllr Noel O'Connor, Hans Daale (EAIHE Netherlands), CEO of City of Cork VEC Ted Owens, Tellervo Tarko (AMKE Finland), Sampo Suihko (AMKE Finland), IVEA General Secretary Michael Moriarty, CEO of Co Cork VEC Joan Russell, René van Schalkwijk (Horizon College Netherlands).



## Practical guidance for Principals and Heads of Centres when faced with investigations under Formal Stage 1 of the Codes of Practice for Dealing with Complaints of Bullying, Harassment and Sexual Harassment in VEC Workplaces.



A forum at national level comprising representatives of management and all trade unions involved in the VEC sector developed two Codes of Practice with an implementation date from 1 September 2006 called the:

- **Code of Practice for Dealing with Complaints of Bullying and Harassment in VEC Workplaces**
- **Code of Practice for Dealing with Complaints of Sexual Harassment in VEC Workplaces**

Both Codes are supported by operational guidelines which issued to all VECs in November 2009 and should be read in conjunction with the Codes.

Critical to understanding how to conduct investigations when faced as a line manager with this task, it is important to ensure that you have a clear understanding of what harassment, sexual harassment and bullying are, and the differences between them. Refer to the official definitions of harassment, sexual harassment (both covered by Employment Equality legislation) and the definition of bullying available in *The Code of Practice on the prevention of workplace bullying (issued by the Health & Safety Authority, March 2007)*.

There are 2 main procedural stages provided under both Codes: an Informal Stage and a Formal Stage and both have 3 sub-stages. Formal Procedure Stage 1 is invoked where the complainant sets down the complaint in writing detailing the actual incidents

of bullying, harassment or sexual harassment and lodges the complaint and supporting documentation with the Head of Centre/Principal.

### General principles which underpin Formal Stage 1 require that:

- Copies of all documentation provided by one party should be furnished to the other party
- That investigation meetings be arranged with the parties to the complaint within 10 working days of receipt of the complainant's written complaint
- That witnesses be interviewed and signed statements provided by witnesses furnished to each of the parties
- That the investigator compile a final report and issues to both the subject and the complainant no later than 10 working days from the conclusion of the investigation and references the right to appeal the findings.

### The Principal/Head of Centre as investigator (under Formal stage 1), seek to ascertain:

- The issue
- The facts
- Test the evidence to determine on the balance of probabilities and having considered all relevant evidence – written, statements, electronic etc., if the complaint is substantiated, not substantiated or inconclusive under each of the allegations/issues cited in the overall complaint.

### After the scheduled investigation interviews have concluded –

- As investigating officer may need to (re) interview various persons concerned to the complaint.
- As a general rule – whatever is provided by way of documentation, statements, footage etc. to one party has to be provided to the other.
- The investigating officer issues the investigation report within the 10-working day timetable following the conclusion of the full investigation.

### The investigation must abide by the rules of natural justice... These include the following:

**The right to be heard:** This means that complaint details/allegations and supporting information must be outlined. All parties have a right of reply to the investigator in their own defence before the Investigator signs off on his/her decision.

**A person should not be a judge in their own cause – (i.e. the rule against bias):** The Investigator must have an open mind and approach and conduct the investigation with no pre-judgment and not have a personal interest in the decision they are making –s/he must remain impartial.

### Fairness and objectivity are critical to conducting investigations:

**The overall aim is to determine whether the complaint is valid or not.** As an investigator, one needs to be able to ascertain whether or not, on the balance of probabilities, the behaviours complained of occurred by identifying evidence and/or

issues which either affirm or disclaim some or all of the matters set out in the complaint. This should be done through an objective assessment of all facts pertaining to the complaint.

Remember, the complaint will very likely include a number of elements. It is important that as Investigators, you judge on the balance of probabilities and having tested and exhausted all the evidence available to you, as to whether the complaint is valid or not under each of the specific elements of the overall allegation/complaint.

All evidence gathered must be tested to see if it assists or has relevance to the complaint under investigation. This can only be achieved by ensuring that all necessary information is supplied to the complainant, witnesses and subject to test it to see if it correlates with their recollection of the events. **So does an Investigator do this?**

- The Investigator gathers all necessary evidence and puts to the complainant, his/her witnesses. Test to see if there is correlation on their recollection of events. The Investigator then does the same for the subject and his/her witnesses.
- As an Investigator, you may need to go back to any one of these parties including particular witnesses for clarification
- Any evidence that is gathered but is not put to the complainant, witnesses and the respondent cannot and should not be relied upon by the investigator as it is untested.
- Where there is dispute about an event i.e. conflicting evidence, the investigator needs to consider if there is strong supporting evidence for a particular version of events, and if so, draw a conclusion accepting one particular version as against the other.

**In moving to reaching a judgement without bias...**the Investigator must make decisions based on all the information gathered: This means that one needs to examine the investigation file and report to ensure all relevant information gathered is contained. Anyone reading the report or the file should be able to identify what are the facts and what information is unsubstantiated. Decisions require clear documentation which supports or

refutes the allegation under each of its component parts.

### **It is important to familiarise yourself with the operational guidelines which issued to all VECs in November 2009.**

#### **So how does one structure an investigation meeting/interview?**

Generally the investigation interview involves three parts:

1. An Introduction
2. Gathering information from the interviewee
3. Closing the interview

### **Conducting an Investigation Interview/Meeting**

#### **Opening the interview:**

- Begin by introducing yourself as Investigating Officer and ideally have a recording secretary with you and introduce him/her.
- Set the individual at their ease. Ask them to state their name and role in the VEC and name of representatives/person accompanying them. If the individual is not represented then note down that they have chosen not to bring someone with them.
- Explain what the purpose of the interview is – (e.g. to investigate allegation of bullying).
- Refer to the fact that the interview will be conducted in line with the Code's provisions and will adhere to the principles of confidentiality, fairness to the parties, independence of you as interviewer and operate within the timeframes set down by the Code.
- Explain what the process will involve...For example – state *"I'll be writing to you to confirm your statement – you will have an opportunity to comment". "I'll be writing to you with my report within 10 working days of concluding my investigation and you will have the right to appeal the findings".*

#### **Running the Interview**

- Explain that the VEC takes these matters very seriously and deals with them confidentially.
- Let interviewee know that there will also be an interview with the other party and that his/her rights are also protected.
- Ask the interviewee to tell you what happened in his/her own words.

- Ask questions to probe for more information.
- Seek to ensure that the interviewee is doing most of the talking (*80/20 rule* where interviewee does 80% of talking and you as interviewer do 20%) and only intervene for clarity and to ensure that the interview is staying on track.
- Summarise or paraphrase to ensure mutual understanding between both of you...ask *"Is there anything you want to add?"*
- Write up your full notes immediately following the interview with the assistance of the recording secretary and type up.
- Take note of any important follow up areas e.g. additional people to be interviewed; questions that need to be asked etc.
- Resist early judgement or involvement.
- The conversation may become heated and emotions may be displayed...so it's important to: remain professional; don't get embroiled.
- **Be comfortable about your authority** – remember you are in control of the interview; adjourn the meeting if necessary (e.g. if you need to take a break or feel interviewee needs a break or indeed if you need to clarify something or get particular advice then adjourn).

#### **Concluding the Interview**

- Reiterate purpose, process and role of the interview.
- Ask interviewee not to discuss the interview with anyone and to maintain strict confidentiality.
- Ask interviewee to maintain a professional relationship with the other party to the complaint and all witnesses.
- Advise of the next steps in the process...e.g. *"I will be writing to you with statement to sign; you'll get a copy of witness statements and all other documentation which will be supplied equally to you and the other party and subsequently, I will send you my report supported by documentation within X no of days".*
- Inform the interviewee of the right to appeal under the Code (but remain objective don't be seen to influence an appeal).
- Finally, thank him/her for their time.

**Interviewing a witness:**

1. Do your introductions as before
2. Begin the interview with an explanation of why it is being conducted:
  - explain briefly the nature of the alleged offence;
  - tell him/her that the interview is to establish facts;
  - let him/her know that they are not personally under investigation
  - reiterate the right to representation and confidentiality of matter (again note down if they advise they did not wish to be accompanied/represented)
3. Elicit witness' understanding / view of the situation.
4. Question and gather facts.
5. Check 'facts' against statements of others.
6. **To conclude the interview with the witness...**
  - Reiterate the purpose of the meeting and the role of this interview
  - Ask him/her not to discuss the interview and to maintain confidentiality
  - Ask him/her to maintain the same professional relationship with the parties as before
  - Advise of the next steps in the process – *"I will write to you asking you to sign your statement and you should return to me by*

*X date). You will be advised only that the investigation is concluded but will **not be privy to the final report**".*

- Thank him/her for their time.

**In relation to Notes and Records**

- When taking notes, record what the person said. Be accurate and provide evidence of what the employee said under questioning.
- Again, a general rule applies that copies of all statements and documentation taken as part of the process must be given to both parties.
- Pass your investigation file to the VEC who will retain records in compliance with the provisions of the Code and Data Protection requirements.
- Importantly – it's not your job as Investigator to recommend sanctions.

**Whilst there is no specific format on how an investigation report should present, it is useful to structure the final investigation report along the following lines:**

**On the cover page:**

- Name the Parties to complaint
- Name of VEC as employer
- Name/s of complainant/s who initiated Investigation
- Name/s of subject/s of the

complaint (respondent/s)

- Report date
- Name of Investigator
- Name of recording secretary
- Supply a table of contents and refer in report to appendices

**A Final Report should include the Case Details**

- Date Complaint Received
- Name/s of Complainant/s
- Name/s of subject/s of complaint
- Function/Department Location – what centre and section and role/title
- Name of others involved, (witnesses, managers, Resolution Facilitators, VEC Contact Persons, HR)
- Terms of Reference for the investigation (available in the operational guidelines, November 2009)
- Brief Details of Nature of the Complaint – in component parts
- Response of the subject of the complaint in component parts
- Outcome of the Investigation in component parts
- Details of follow-up actions – what you did after the investigation e.g. *re-interviewed witness A*
- Processing time of case \_\_\_\_ days/weeks.

**Further information is available from IVEA or from trade union head offices.**

## Soon to launch...Guidelines for Schools on Data Protection

THE managerial bodies, primary and post-primary, the Department and the Deputy Director of the Data Protection Commissioner's Office met a number of months ago to commence discussions on a major project to develop Guidelines on Data Protection for Schools. A technical working group was established (under the steering group) and significant work has been undertaken to advance the draft Guidelines.

It is intended that the Guidelines, when finalised, will present in the form of a website and provide information on a range of related matters e.g.

- What is Data Protection & why is it important for schools?
- Definitions of Data Protection and Sensitive Personal Data
- Eight Rules of Data Protection that schools need to be mindful of
- Guidance on retaining records
- Guidance on requests for access to information held and rectifying personal data held
- Storage & Security of Personal Data

In addition, the Guidelines will provide a checklist to enable schools to test their compliance and assist them in developing



their own data protection policy. Template policies, advice and procedures will be provided which are specifically geared so that schools can draw the information down and adapt them for their own use. Specialist advice across a range of areas will also be provided e.g. the use of PPS numbers; CCTV, biometrics etc. and, a list of useful contacts will present on the website when finalised.

The subgroup is due to conclude its work very shortly. A process of legal proofing will be required and it is hoped that the website will launch in autumn 2011.



## Dr. Harold Hislop launches Co. Cork VEC's Team-Teaching Guidelines and accompanying DVD

Dr. Harold Hislop, Chief Inspector, recently launched Guidelines for Team-Teaching and an accompanying DVD, produced by Co. Cork VEC, to assist primary and post-primary schools in introducing and sustaining effective team-teaching. In his address he described the initiative as having "extended the possibilities available to schools ... You have shown that team-teaching can be one of the most appropriate interventions that could be used to attend to additional needs and more importantly, you have shown that convincing gains in students' learning and achievement can occur when team-teaching is used".



Left to right: Cllr. Gerry Kelly, Chairman, County Cork VEC, Dr. Harold Hislop, Chief Inspector, Department of Education & Skills, Ms. Joan Russell, CEO, County Cork VEC, Professor Barrie Bennett, University of Toronto and Cllr. Noel O'Connor, President of IVEA.

The Guidelines were prepared as a result of Co. Cork VEC schools/colleges' experience in team-teaching. In the academic year 2007/2008, Co. Cork VEC initiated a pilot project to introduce team-teaching in their schools/colleges. The project commenced with seven schools/colleges, varying in size from 250 pupils to 700 pupils. Teachers were supported through cluster meetings over the school year, which provided them with an opportunity to work in teams to plan; schemes and lessons, modes of assessment and teaching strategies, as well as accessing professional development and share experiences.

The project was formally evaluated, through the use of questionnaires and interviews as well as reviewing data on student progress, behaviour, attendance and engagement, teacher professional development over a two year period, resulting in the production of guidelines and an accompanying DVD.

IVEA intends to run a CPD Programme for teachers, in its new training centre in Naas, in the coming academic year. At the Launch Ceremony; Cllr. Gerry Kelly, Cathaoirleach Co. Cork VEC, formally presented the Guidelines to the President of IVEA, Cllr. Noel O'Connor.



Coiste Gairmoideachais Chontae Dhún na nGall  
County Donegal Vocational Education Committee



Key Speaker Estelle MacDonal, from Collingwood Primary School in Hull, England, addresses the Beyond Zero Tolerance conference

## Beyond Zero Tolerance: Promoting Restorative Practices in Education in Co Donegal

Over 80 people attended a conference "Beyond Zero Tolerance: Promoting Restorative Practices in Education in Co Donegal" in Letterkenny recently. This featured Estelle Macdonald, a school Principal from Collingwood Primary School in Hull, England and one of the world's leading experts in the use of restorative practices in educational settings.

Ms MacDonal spoke inspirationally about a different way of working with young people with challenging behaviour. The approach is based on the belief that the people best-placed to resolve a conflict or a problem are those directly involved and that punishing children is less effective than allowing them to understand the consequences of their behaviour and make amends themselves: "We were really interested in emotional wellbeing and believed children should be happy and responsible for their own behaviour, and that was the key to moving forward." said Ms Macdonald whose own school graduated in Department of Education appraisals from "special measures" to "outstanding" within 18 months, following implementation of the approach. Hull City Council's children's services department decided to adopt the method after it was used successfully in Collingwood, piloted in a wider area and, following impressive results in schools and communities, it is now being rolled out across the city.

Other conference speakers included Margaret McGarrigle and Paddy O'Connor, both of whom have been involved in the promotion and use of restorative practices in schools and Youthreach Centres in Co Donegal. Director of the Hull Centre for Restorative Practices, Mark Finnis, facilitated a workshop for conference participants – school principals, teachers, youth leaders, Youthreach staff as well as JLO's, Gardaí and HSE and Council personnel.

MaryAnn Kane, CEO of Donegal VEC, said that this conference was the beginning of what will be a larger initiative involving schools, youth programmes and other agencies working together to improve the lives of everyone, but particularly children and young people, in Donegal.

The conference was organised by the Donegal Mediation Project, an initiative led by County Donegal VEC and supported by HSE West through the Donegal CDB Peace and Reconciliation Partnership.

## 2011 John Marcus O'Sullivan Summer School

By Dr Barney O'Reilly, Tralee

**I**NCREASED diversity of belief systems in our schools is a new social reality for schools throughout the country arising from the presence of significant numbers of migrant families from many parts of the world that have now become part of our communities. In addition to that, the religious beliefs of many who have always lived in Ireland are beginning to change. This new reality makes it increasingly important that the publicly managed schools - that is the schools managed by the VEC (Vocational Education Committee) system - would review the role they play in ensuring that all of the children of the nation are equally cherished and the freedom of religious belief and expression which the Constitution guarantees to all citizens is protected. This is a responsibility that falls particularly on publicly-managed schools which are not established to serve the needs of one particular religion but to serve the needs of all the people.

The growing diversity in Ireland and in Irish schools over the last decade has raised questions about the structure,



The 2011 John Marcus O'Sullivan Summer School will take place at the Carlton Hotel, Tralee on June 16th and 17th next with the theme:

**'Religion, Diversity and Publicly-managed Schools in Ireland'.**

management and organisation of Irish schooling. At the same time, there has been little focus on the distinctive

role of publicly managed schools in relation to notions of citizenship and belonging. This Summer School aims to address these issues by providing an opportunity for debate, discussion and learning on the distinctive contribution of publicly managed schools within an ever more diverse Ireland.

Internationally renowned U.S. education-  
alist, Professor Walter Feinberg, will deliver the keynote address on the evening of June 16th and will participate in a round table discussion with Summer School attendees on the morning of June 17th. Prof. Feinberg is a past president of both the American Educational Studies Association and the Philosophy of Education Society.

The Minister for Education and Skills, Ruairí Quinn, T.D. will deliver a closing address on the afternoon of Friday, June 17th. In addition, workshops on the development of school policies and the challenges facing classroom teachers around issues of religious diversity will take place.

This Summer School continues a tradition established by the VECs in Kerry in the 1970's, to commemorate the memory of John Marcus O'Sullivan, T.D. for Kerry who was Minister for Education, 1927-1932, and the Minister who steered the Vocational Education Act, 1930, into law.

For the 2011 event, Kerry Education Service—the VEC in Kerry, is joined by Co. Dublin VEC, IVEA and by the University of Limerick, Department of Education and Professional Studies.

The event is of relevance to the boards, parent councils and staff of VEC schools, to members of VEC committees, and to members of the public with an interest in publicly-managed education.

Registration forms are available on the Kerry Education Service website: [www.cokerryed.ie](http://www.cokerryed.ie)

For further details contact Gráinne Mulvihill at [gmulvihill@cokerryed.ie](mailto:gmulvihill@cokerryed.ie) or 066-7121248.



IVEA has recently been joined by some members of the animal kingdom. Three foxes have set up home in the back garden of McCann House.

## Minister for Education and Skills, Ruairi Quinn, TD

Dublin South East T.D Ruairi Quinn, was recently appointed as Minister of State for Training and Skills at the Department of Education and Skills.

- He was a Member of Dublin City Council from 1974 to 1977.
- First elected to Dail Eireann in the 1977 General Election.
- He also served as a member of Seanad Éireann in 1976 and 1981.
- He is a former Minister for Finance, Leader of the Labour Party, Chairman of the European Council of Finance Ministers (ECOFIN).
- Currently he is the Vice President and Treasurer of the Party of European Socialists.



## Minister for Training and Skills, Ciarán Cannon, TD

Galway East T.D Ciaran Cannon, was recently appointed as Minister of State for Training and Skills at the Department of Education and Skills.

- He was elected to Galway County Council in June 2004
- Following the 2007 General Election he was nominated to Seanad Eireann by An Taoiseach.
- In April 2008 he was elected as Leader of the Progressive Democrats; the first to come from Seanad Éireann.
- He resigned the leadership of the Progressive Democrats on 24 March 2009 and on that same day he joined Fine Gael.



## Minister for Research and Innovation, Seán Sherlock, TD

In March 2011 Cork East T.D Seán Sherlock, was appointed as Minister of State, Department of Enterprise, Jobs & Innovation and Department of Education & Skills.

- Co-opted to Cork County Council and Mallow Town Council in 2003 and elected to both in 2004
- Elected to Dáil Eireann in 2007 and was spokesperson on Agriculture and Food.



## New CEEOA President elected

Fiona Hartley, Chief Executive Officer, County Wicklow VEC was elected to the position of President of the Association of Chief Executive Officers and Education Officers (CEEEOA) at the Spring Conference of the Association in April. Fiona has been Chief Executive Officer in County Wicklow VEC since 2006 and prior to that was Education Officer with County Dublin VEC from 1999. Fiona also worked in City of Dublin VEC where she was Principal of Whitehall College. Fiona says she is honoured to have been elected to the role of President and looks forward to advancing and developing the VEC sector together with the IVEA during this challenging time.



Date for your diary!

# "Creating Skills Today for Tomorrow's Europe"

**EUproVET 2nd Annual Conference 15 June, 2011**

**Venue: Hotel Bristol Stephanie  
250, Rue Royale  
B-1210 Brussels**

**Please inform IVEA Head Office if you wish to  
attend the Conference.**

