

IVEA NEWS

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Representing Vocational Education Committees

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



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Editor: DEIRDRE KEOGH

A case for supporting educational provision

FIGHTING the case for increasing financial support for education in the context of an economy on its knees is becoming increasingly difficult. But defending educational provision is certainly a worthwhile objective. As outgoing INTO General Secretary John Carr recently said, *"our young students only get one chance of a good education and they can't wait for this recession to end"*. This may appear obvious but represents a devastatingly true reality.

Over the past year, our schools and education centres have struggled along as best they can, but many are now on the verge of collapse because they have been extensively stripped of their middle management tier by the ongoing moratorium on filling posts of responsibility. The Minister has hinted that there may be some alleviation of the impact of the moratorium; this needs to happen sooner rather than later. Posts of responsibility have a real pastoral care dimension for students, so it is students who are the greatest losers when pastoral care posts remain vacant.

The moratorium on the filling of posts is both a crude and cruel instrument, implemented across the entire public service with the purpose of reducing public service numbers and staffing costs. The directive takes no regard for the consequential effects of the staffing cuts on Irish students and clients of education services. At some stage, however, there must be a halt to the process, as the weakest in society suffer most when such actions are implemented indiscriminately. For example, IVEA has been decrying the ongoing scandal of unfilled Adult Education Officer posts, whose role is charged with the co-ordination and delivery of adult education services to many who are marginalised and many more who are seeking to reskill in the face of rising unemployment. Is it because these people have no voice that our calls to fill a mere eight or nine such posts falls on deaf ears in the Department of Finance?

Fear, anger and concern over education and salary cuts have been accentuated by the spectacle of Government bailing out banks with massive amounts of taxpayers' money. Individual and corporate greed, bank recklessness and light touch regulation, have all contributed to the morass in which Ireland finds itself and public servants feel aggrieved that they are being made pay for the recklessness of a few.

Teaching is a vocation and this vocational dimension permeates all levels of the education sector including VEC administration, members of Committees, education and executive staff. The State always gets more than it pays for from people with a strong vocational outlook. But morale in schools is low, staff are demoralised and there is a real danger that the culture that exists in schools of giving "above and beyond" may be lost forever.

School managements are presently barely coping with the effects of the combination of union directives, resourcing cutbacks and the moratorium on filling of posts. VEC administrations are also under severe strain as administrative posts remain unfilled. Although the *Renewed Programmed for Government* did provide some restored relief to schools from the worst excesses of the education cuts, much more needs to be done in this regard. Schools and education centres are mini-societies which reflect the values of society. They need to be supported, as to do so nurtures the young – who have that one chance of a good education. They should not have to pay for the sins of the fathers.

An Taoiseach, Brian Cowan T.D. tasks Co. Monaghan VEC to oversee the procurement of a multi-user education campus in Monaghan

Co. Monaghan VEC received a welcome visit from An Taoiseach, Mr Brian Cowen last November. An Taoiseach attended a specially convened VEC Committee meeting to announce the development of a multi-user education campus in Monaghan.

AN Taoiseach confirmed approval for Co. Monaghan VEC to purchase the site of the former Military Barracks in Monaghan from the Department of Defence. The former Military Barracks is a twenty acre site located on the outskirts of Monaghan town. In his address to Co. Monaghan VEC, Mr Cowen noted that the lands being purchased would be used as a multi-user Educational Campus consisting of a Gaelscoil, Gael Choláiste, Institute of Further Education and provision for a further primary school. An Taoiseach stated *"I am also to advise that Co Monaghan VEC is approved to oversee, on a pilot basis, the procurement of all facilities on the site"* and requested that Mr Martin O'Brien, CEO, Co. Monaghan VEC, project manage the brief as outlined.

An Taoiseach stated that *"at a time when we are looking at what the role of VECs will be in the future, I believe this is a very innovative and interesting idea to bring various schools in the town onto one location, it is an opportunity for the VEC to demonstrate what it can do. I wish you well with the project – congratulations and the best of luck"*.

In his response to the announcement, Martin O'Brien CEO emphasised that the development was of huge significance for County Monaghan. He stated *"that viewed in the context of 'An Agenda to Transform the Public Service', it was of national*



An Taoiseach presents Martin O'Brien CEO with the keys to the Kingdom!

(L-R) Mr Martin G. O'Brien, Chief Executive Officer, Co. Monaghan VEC, An Taoiseach, Mr Brian Cowen T.D., Ms Margaret Conlon T.D., Mr Seamus Coyle, Chairperson, Co. Monaghan VEC

significance what the VEC was being asked to do. The new campus will bring almost two thousand people onto one site". He stressed that *"the VEC would lead and deliver the project with pride, that the facilities would be available for students in 2012 and that these state of the art facilities would be delivered within budgets approved by the Department of Education and Science"*. In welcoming the challenge, Martin noted that the new campus would *"facilitate shared services and resources and increased administration efficiency and effectiveness"*.

Since the Taoiseach's welcome announcement in 2009, Co. Monaghan VEC has been working relentlessly to advance the project. This large-scale construction

project will involve the demolition of the existing barracks in the first instance, construction of the FE College, primary and post-primary schools and the development of on-site facilities and services. A strategy for the development project has been prepared, submitted to the Department of Education and Science and implementation has commenced. The tendering process for key services has commenced and some appointments have been made. A Single Point Design Team, Quantity Surveyor and Independent Project Supervisor Design Process will all be formally appointed in June of this year. Co. Monaghan VEC is confident that all facilities will be delivered within budget and by the appointed date.

Bridging the Gap between Education, Training and Work: Challenges for VET Providers

By Michael Moriarty, General Secretary, IVEA

I recently addressed a conference in Brussels hosted by the European Economic and Social Committee Employers' Group which focussed on issues around bridging the gap between industry and vocational education and training, in particular initial vocational education and training. The following day, I attended a conference centred on "*New Skills for New Jobs: Action Now*". These conferences and others, have informed the strategy document *Europe 2020*¹; the European Commission's blueprint for repositioning Europe in the global economy and returning Europe to economic growth and prosperity.

The Commission's strategy document declares that **skills are the key element for Europe's economic and productivity growth**. Ensuring the availability of skilled personnel is crucial, as there is a clear trend across all sectors of industry towards knowledge and skills-intensive occupations. A skilled workforce is absolutely necessary to ensure a strong industrial base to drive the economies of Europe forward.

As well as enhanced job-based skills, it is becoming crucial for workers to gain what is known as **generic skills** which are transferable from one occupation to another. The faculty of critical thinking, creative skills, communication and influencing skills, teamwork and self-directed learning are all becoming increasingly important for workers' employability, economic performance and future prosperity.

These goals can only be achieved by providing high-quality vocational education and training (VET) across Europe which provides workers, including young people, with the skills and competencies required to meet companies' needs. The

Copenhagen Process (2002)² focuses on the capacity of VET to deliver the expertise and skills sets, to cope with the rapidly changing world of work. VET is central to European efforts to reposition itself in the global economy, as it is the sector of education closest to the labour market. For the labour market to prosper and grow in the increasingly competitive globalised marketplace, depends very much on the extent to which VET can deliver the knowledge, skills and competencies that the labour market needs.

Early identification and anticipation of skills requirements in a changing social and economic environment is a very important "push" factor for change, and must become a priority for VET providers. **Skills needs' anticipation** focussing on both generic skills and sector-specific skills, will require co-operation and communication between VET providers and employers. Employers have a key stake and therefore a key role to play in the education of their future employees.

Information transfer will be key to this important synergy between business and VET. The European Commission has recognised that closer social dialogue and co-operation between education bodies and employers are a prerequisite if VET is to respond effectively to labour market needs. The establishment of Sectoral Councils at both European and national levels is to be welcomed, as is the *European Labour Market Monitor Report*³ and the *Skills for Jobs and Match and Map*⁴ programmes, which are intended to provide accurate and comprehensive labour market information.

Flexibility of response is a key challenge for VET providers if the EU objective of

new skills for new jobs is to be achieved. Flexibility of learning pathways and open access policies must become more common to reflect the requirement for enhanced general and job-specific skills training. Flexibility in skills acquisition is about providing options and choices to meet learners' specific needs and aptitudes and, providing varied opportunities for different career paths and learning routes. Diversity in VET pathways is now required to meet the needs of all students – including those with lesser abilities or with different aptitudes. The VET sector must develop greater flexibility of delivery, especially through modularisation and distance learning, to allow learners to work at their own pace in educational programmes – thus providing them with a richer personal experience and encouraging them to commit to a lifelong approach to learning.

Flexibility can mean a capacity to transfer back and forth between secondary general education and vocational education and training. Offering both VET and general education content within the same programme allows students to keep their options open. Such pathways are already being developed in the UK, Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Finland, Poland and Portugal. In other countries such as Slovenia, one-year bridging programmes provided at the end of upper secondary education make it possible for VET students to re-enter general secondary education.

Flexibility is also about developing new models of internship and apprenticeship training. Many EU states are following "**flexicurity**" principles by providing public funds supported by the European Social Fund to enable firms to combine short-term work with training. Apprenticeships

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/eu2020/pdf/eu2020_en.pdf

² http://ec.europa.eu/education/vocational-education/doc/1143_en.htm Council Resolution of 19 December 2002 on the promotion of enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training (2003/C 13/02)

³ <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=120&langId=en>. In response to the need to closely monitor the rapidly changing situation on a more frequent basis and provide up-to-date information on recent developments following the economic crisis which hit in October 2008, a monthly monitoring report on the EU labour market situation and outlook was established in 2009.

⁴ <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=568&langId=en&newsId=431&furtherNews=yes> Proposals for better job matching and more effective ways to analyse and predict which skills will be needed in tomorrow's labour market were presented by the European Commission on 16 December 2008 in *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - New Skills for New Jobs - Anticipating and matching labour market and skills needs (SEC(2008) 3058)*, p.12.

are now a priority for financing from the European Social Fund.

Curricula and assessment must be flexible and supportive of the development of both generic/soft and specific skills which embed entrepreneurship and innovation at all levels.

As part of a longer-term response to the need to develop worker skills, it is important that VET providers recognise the potential of validating and recognising knowledge, skills and competences learned outside the formal education training system.

Other priorities are also emerging. There is a renewed focus on the **enhancement of basic education skills**. EU studies suggest that the availability of jobs for those with low levels of education and skills will continue to decrease. It is a key objective of the European *2020 Strategy* to move the workforce and the entirety of the adult population up the skills ladder. As a main pillar of lifelong learning, VET has a crucial role to play in Europe's efforts to enhance the skills levels of its citizens. There is a significant challenge for VET providers in terms of re-education and retraining programmes to address those adults who have left education early or have low skill

levels and low participation rates.

VET providers must also recognise the **greater mobility of skilled workers** throughout Europe. All member states' Qualifications Frameworks are being referenced with the European Qualifications Framework, allowing one country's qualifications to be matched and recognised in another, thus significantly enhancing the mobility and flexibility of workers. Vertical and horizontal mobility within VET systems and between VET and Higher Education are also enhanced by the European Qualification Framework.

*The Copenhagen Process*⁵ saw the need to **increase the attractiveness of VET**. Providing learners with a greater range of VET pathways will help this process. There is also the argument for bringing academic education and VET closer together. *The Helsinki Communiqué (2006)*⁶ requires countries to have open VET systems, with flexible individual pathways, and the *Bordeaux Communiqué*⁷ argues the need to build bridges between educational pathways.

Social exclusion both inhibits social cohesion and limits growth. **Removing barriers to accessing education** is a guiding principle highlighted in all member states.

The challenge for VET providers is to address such obstacles as: learners' financial difficulties; core skills deficits; study skills deficits; lack of educational and vocational guidance; lack of accreditation for prior experiential learning, experience or skills; lack of coherent learning routes and lack of support and practical assistance – among others.

EU President José Manuel Barroso said recently, *"The exit from the crisis should be the point of entry into a new sustainable social market economy, a smarter, greener economy, where our prosperity will come from innovation and from using resources better, and where the key input will be knowledge"*⁸ and skills.

The challenge for the VET sector is to develop flexible, responsive and timely educational programmes which will deliver the expertise and skills which will match the expectations of both students and industry and which will enable future competitiveness and prosperity, and enhanced living standards and social inclusion.

There is no doubt that Europe is now relying more on VET to deliver it back to prosperity and growth. This begs the obvious question as to whether VET is up to the challenge?

⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/education/vocational-education/doc1143_en.htm "Council Resolution of 19 December 2002 on the promotion of enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training (2003/C 13/02)", p.C 13/3.

⁶ http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/doc/helsinkicom_en.pdf "The Helsinki Communiqué on Enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training", p.6.

⁷ http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/bordeaux_en.pdf "The Bordeaux Communiqué on enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training", p.6.

⁸ http://ec.europa.eu/eu2020/pdf/eu2020_en.pdf, p.2.

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What is Facebook?

Facebook is a social networking website that is operated and privately owned by Facebook Inc.

Since September 2006, anyone over the age of 13 with a valid e-mail address can become a Facebook user. Users can add friends and send them messages and update their personal profiles to notify friends about themselves. Additionally, users can join networks organised by workplace, school, or college.

The website's name stems from the colloquial name of books given to students at the start of the academic year by university administrations in the US with the intention of helping students to get to know each other better.

In addition to IVEA Press Releases, our Facebook page will be updated regularly with VEC and other education-related content from the media.

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Changes to procedures to enhance the integrity of 2010 State Examinations

The State Examinations Commission, representatives of school managements and principals met recently concerning proposed changes to procedures intended to enhance the integrity of State examinations. A particular focus was placed on the correct opening and distribution of question papers. **Arising from the discussions, the following arrangements will be established for the 2010 State examinations:**

Primary responsibility for the safeguarding of the integrity of the question papers rests with the superintendent in relation to the correct opening and distribution of the papers in accordance with procedures specified by the State Examinations Commission (SEC).

With regard to additional validation on the opening and distribution of correct papers by Superintendents:

The SEC will introduce a superintendents' partner system in relation to question paper packet validation for the 2010 Certificate Examinations. This will result in individual superintendents collaborating with a nominated superintendent prior to each examination sitting in order to validate that the packets of question papers they have each taken from the question paper boxes are correct for the session next scheduled to commence..

The system will be administered by the SEC.

School authorities will fulfil a watching brief in relation to the day-to-day operation of the system and will participate in the validation process in certain circumstances.

Following completion of examination centre amalgamations at the end of April 2010, the SEC will provide each school with:

- A list of centres assigned to that school
- Details of centres which will be matched together in order to facilitate the question paper packet validation process (centres will be matched up according to duration, i.e. the two centres of longest duration will be matched together and so on...).

Schools will be advised to revert as soon as possible to SEC in the event that the proposed centre match-ups are not manageable at school level, if, for example, the proposed centres are in different locations and it would not be possible for the superintendents to collaborate as required.

SEC will then issue revised centre match-up details to the schools concerned, having regard to schools advice on the matter.

Each superintendent's assignment letter will include

details of the centre he/she will partner with for validation purposes.

The question paper packet validation process will be carried out at a central location in each school (e.g. staffroom) as near as possible to the start time for each examination session.

It is noted that the packets of papers would not be opened as part of this validation rather, they can only be opened in the examination centre itself when a candidate will be asked by the superintendent to validate that the packet is unopened and that the seals are intact.

A declaration will also appear on each question paper packet containing *inter alia*, a confirmation that seals are intact and that examination details on the label correspond to the timetable and are correct for the examination session.

Each question paper packet will be signed by the superintendent of the centre concerned, the second signature (Checked by), in order of preference will be that of;

- Partner superintendent as nominated by the SEC
- Another superintendent assigned to the school
- School representative (Examinations Aide, Examinations Secretary, Deputy Principal, Principal)

The SEC will provide detailed instructions to superintendents and schools which will outline their role in relation to the operation of the validation system. These instructions will clearly state that the primary responsibility for adherence to the specified procedures and the opening and distribution of the correct question paper for each examination session rests with the superintendent.

The SEC will notify Management Bodies prior to issuing material on the question paper packet validation process to schools.

It was also proposed at the meeting that further measures were necessary to confirm that each question paper packet is intact prior to opening in the examination centre. The SEC has agreed with this proposal and accordingly the question paper packet will also include a section whereby a candidate from each centre will be required to verify that each packet was sealed prior to being opened in the centre.



Seminars on “VEC Risk – excellence in governance through best practice risk management”

By Mr Alan Connolly, General Manager,
Irish Public Bodies Mutual Insurances Ltd. (IPB)



Since the publication of “**VEC Risk – excellence in governance through best practice risk management**” on 5 November 2009, IPB has been busy meeting with Chief Executive Officers and staff throughout the country’s VECs to provide introductory awareness sessions, seminars and workshops on managing risk. The VSSU has also been represented at these sessions and each of the sessions comprised an overview of the content of “**VEC Risk**”, the current VEC environment and the type of risks that could prevent the achievement of the Education/Business Plan. The role of the Risk Management Co-ordinator was also discussed.

Sessions were facilitated by IPB’s Risk Manager, Ms Rosemary Ryan and the objectives detailed in “**VEC Risk**” were explored. These objectives include:

1. Providing an introduction and overview to the concept of managing risk to VEC personnel
2. Outlining the method of establishing and maintaining a practical organisation-wide approach to managing risk and to set down the key steps to be undertaken
3. Describing the tools and techniques that can be employed in developing a structured and systematic approach to identifying, assessing and managing VEC risks.

Emphasis in each session was placed on the recognition that:

- Managing risk is effective management
- The management of risk should be integrated into existing management structures
- The focus should be on successfully managing risk rather than on the system of risk management
- Risk management increases the probability of success and reduces the probability of failure.

The introductory awareness sessions also focused on how risk can impact at various

levels of the VEC such as strategic, operational, financial and reputational.

Following the completion of the introductory awareness sessions a powerpoint presentation with speaker’s notes was made available to each VEC. This will facilitate the risk management co-ordinator to deliver a 20-minute presentation on “**VEC Risk**” to key internal and external stakeholders.

Prompter questions are provided in “**VEC Risk**” to assist in the identification of risk; questions include:

1. What are the key deliverables that the VEC expects from your service?
2. Are there any issues that could prevent you from meeting these objectives?
3. Over the last two years, what problems prevented you from meeting these objectives?
4. Do you know of any events or problems that other VECs have encountered that are relevant to your service?
5. How is the ability of your service to meet these objectives measured?
6. Do you meet the measure (if any)? What helps/hinders you in meeting them?
7. What problems or changes can you foresee in the short and medium-term that may prevent you from achieving your objectives?

Risks for a VEC may also be identified from reports, legislation and standards such as:

- Reports:
 - Comptroller and Auditor General, and VSSU
 - Reviews/investigations of organisational governance deficits
 - Report of Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure Programmes (McCarthy Report) (2009)
 - Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies (Department of Finance, 2009)

- Legislation:
 - Data Protection Act, 1998-2003
 - Disability Act, 2005
- Standards:
 - ISO 31000 Risk Management Standard (2009)

How do we identify risks? The Steering Committee which worked to develop this model identified nine categories of risk relating specifically to the education sector. A key question raised in the publication is: *how do you identify risks to the achievement of the Education Plan?* Examples of the categories of risks identified included:

1. **Professional/Managerial:** Failure to provide competent staff at all levels
2. **Student/Adult Learner:** Failure to meet the growing demand for places at adult education level
3. **Contractual:** Failure to carry out risk assessment of new contracts entered into by the VEC
4. **Business Continuity:** Risk of server breakdown and no data backed-up
5. **Physical:** Risk from deficits in safety management system
6. **Legislative/Regulatory:** Failure to maintain adequate records to demonstrate compliance with required legislation
7. **Legal:** Failure to implement corrective action to prevent damage and subsequent claim against the VEC
8. **Social:** Risks arising from failure to plan for changes in demographics
9. **Financial:** Risk from financial uncertainty.

During February and March four day-long seminars and workshops were delivered in VEC locations including Co. Mayo, Co. Dublin, Co. Laois and Co. Waterford. Participants included CEOs, VEC and VSSU staff. The objective was to provide participants with the tools and techniques for identifying and assessing risk.

All VECs have embraced the concept of managing risk. Support to date has been demonstrated by the numbers of nominees participating at each event and the enthusiasm of participants to develop their competency base.

In the current environment each VEC faces many challenges. Support from IPB has been focused on:

- Promoting the practice of managing risk
- Promoting risk self-assessment
- Integrating the practice of managing risk into the everyday business activities of the VEC

- Focus on managing the key risks which could prevent the achievement of the Education/Business Plan.

In the coming months, dates for four further seminars and workshops have been agreed. Located in county VECs including Roscommon, Kildare, Offaly and City of Cork. These seminars and workshops will focus on completing the assessment of risk; identifying appropriate management actions to control risk, as well as identifying owners for each risk. All relevant information for each risk will be documented in a risk register for the VEC.

By the end of 2010, it is expected that each VEC will have developed a risk register. The risk register will be a repository of all risks that could prevent the achievement of the Education/ Business Plan for the VEC. It will assist in monitoring the effectiveness of management actions employed to control the risk, as well as assisting in providing reports to management and the Committee on how the VEC is managing risk so as to support the demonstration of good governance.

Should further information be required, please contact IPB's risk manager: rosemary.ryan@ipb.ie



(L-R): Mr Sean Ashe CEO, Co. Kildare VEC (and President of CEEOA); Ms Anne O'Keeffe CEO, Co. Laois VEC; Mr Batt O'Keeffe T.D., Minister for Enterprise, Trade & Innovation; Ms Marie Griffin CEO, Co. Dublin VEC; Mr Shaun Purcell CEO, Co. Sligo, VEC; Mr Alan Connolly, General Manager, IPB; Ms Rosemary Ryan, Risk Manager, IPB.

VEC NPF National Innovation Awards

The VEC National Partnership Forum (VEC NPF) National Innovation Awards, held in December 2009, were developed to recognise, reward and promote innovation and excellence in the VEC sector. This year's awards were presented by inspirational

former VEC students including Donegal's Packie Bonner, Kerry Team Manager, Jack O'Connor and Postbank CEO, Margaret Sweeney.

Further details are available on www.vecnfp.com



Former VEC student Jack O'Connor presents VEC NPF National Innovation award to Co. Tipperary (NR) VEC for its "Educational Leadership Programme".



Former VEC student Packie Bonner presents VEC NPF National Innovation award to Co. Donegal VEC and MABS for "Eurowatchers".

An Eye to Europe



In line with IVEA's expanding European profile, *IVEA News* is keeping its eye to European initiatives which may be of interest to readers.

Innovation Commissioner backs EU 3% Research Target

MÁIRE Geoghegan-Quinn, the EU's Commissioner for Research, Innovation and Science, believes that the EU's target of spending 3% of GDP on research and development (R&D) must remain in place if Europe is to put itself firmly on the road to economic recovery. The new Commissioner acknowledged current debates surrounding the 3% R&D objective but insisted that *"now is the wrong time to make cutbacks in a sector that is underperforming in many EU member states"*.



Máire Geoghegan-Quinn, the EU's Commissioner for Research, Innovation and Science

The Commissioner was delivering the keynote address on 5 March at the Lisbon Council's 2010 Innovation Summit – her first major speech as Innovation Commissioner since the European Parliament hearing in January. Speaking about the 3% target, *Commissioner Geoghegan-Quinn stated "I know that this is controversial. But I believe that it should stay. Research ministers have told me in clear terms that its existence has strengthened their hand in their dealings with their finance ministers. Now is exactly the wrong moment to remove this discipline."*

"With budgets under pressure, Governments may view research and development as an easy area for cutbacks. But we know, from the experiences of countries like Finland, that raising R&D budgets is the route to recovery," she added.

The Commissioner sees research and innovation as core components of the EU's new *"Europe 2020 strategy"* and believes that they must be prioritised to create new sources of growth and employment.

Brussels unveils 2020 economic roadmap for Europe

JOSÉ Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission, has unveiled a long-awaited 10-year plan for greener growth and jobs in Europe, proposing a limited set of targets on education, R&D and poverty reduction and policy warnings for EU countries that fail to meet them.



José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission

If implemented, the strategy should bring *"at least 2% growth to Europe,"* Barroso said when presenting his proposals in Brussels on March 3rd. However, he said it would be *"too risky"* to speculate on a precise figure as the current economic crisis had made the situation difficult to predict.

The strategy defines five headline targets at EU level, which member states will be asked to translate into national goals reflecting their differing starting points:

- Raising the **employment rate** of the population aged 20-64 from the current 69% to 75%.
- Raising the **investment in R&D** to 3% of the EU's GDP.
- Meeting the **EU's '20/20'** objectives on greenhouse gas emission reduction and renewable energies.
- Reducing the share of **early school leavers** from the current 15% to under 10% and making sure that at least 40% of youngsters have a degree or diploma.
- Reducing the number of Europeans living below the **poverty line** by 25%, lifting 20 million out of poverty from the current 80 million.

Some of these objectives, like the 3% R&D target, already featured in the EU's previous strategy – the *Lisbon Agenda*.

A series of seven flagship initiatives were identified where joint action will be initiated: on innovation, youth, the digital agenda, resource efficiency, industrial policy, skills and jobs and the fight against poverty.

CEDEFOP – New Skills for New Jobs

The latest forecast of the skills demand and supply issued by CEDEFOP in Europe estimates that around 7 million more jobs will be generated by 2020 than there are today – despite the recession.

In addition, it is estimated that another 73 million job opportunities will be created due to the need to replace workers who, for example, retire or change jobs. Consequently the total number of job opportunities over the next decade is projected to rise to around 80 million. The question is do we have the right skills to fill them?

Even though new jobs will be created, it is estimated that today there are 10 million fewer jobs than were expected before the crisis. Assuming a modest recovery, employment in 2020 may reach just below its peak of around 275 million in 2008.

Vocational education and training in Ireland and abroad will need to focus on the development of new skills be it in information technology, green jobs, services and high-tech industries. Although there will be job openings for all types of occupations, in line with recent trends, most new jobs (projected to be around 8.5 million) will be in knowledge and skills intensive occupations such as high level managerial and technical jobs.

Therefore, there will be a high demand for qualifications. CEDEFOP projects that the demand for skills (as measured by formal qualifications) is likely to continue rising. The demand for high and medium-qualified groups will rise but at the expense of the lower qualified.

CEDEFOP has identified a move towards a service economy and away from primary and basic manufacturing activities and a further substantial decline in employment in primary industries, was forecast with a loss of around 2.5 million jobs, especially in agriculture.

"Vocational education and training policy must adapt to the new demands of the workplace. Labour supply level is largely pre-determined by demography and educational/training decisions already made" says IVEA General Secretary Michael Moriarty.

Most people aged 15-24 are still acquiring qualifications. The number of people in the working population aged over 50 with high and medium level qualifications is to rise with around 15 million more people expected to hold university degree or equivalent.

The low qualified are projected to fall by around 15 million as higher qualified young people enter the labour market and many less well qualified older people leave it.

IVEA General Secretary Michael Moriarty concludes: *"the result of CEDEFOP's forecast shows that the occupational structure of Europe is moving towards knowledge and skills intensive jobs. Policy makers in member states clearly need to ensure the best use of currently available skills. Greater use of validation of non-formal and informal learning as well as lifelong guidance could support a better batch of skills and jobs so that human resources can respond to economic needs. Member State policies must ensure that people are enabled to raise and broaden their skills and this must include generic transferable skills"*.

Employers in
Education

THE EUROPEAN
FEDERATION OF
EDUCATION
EMPLOYERS

IVEA – in EFEE – in Europe



*By Charles Nolda, Consultant
and former General Secretary, EFEE*

IN Brussels there are, without exaggeration, tens of thousands of interest groups, associations and networks, all vying for influence and privileged information at the seat of power. Surprisingly, given that Education is so important, it is only within the last year that an organisation to represent the interests of employers in Education has finally been set up at European level.

The organisation is known as the European Federation of Education Employers (EFEE) and IVEA is one of its members. At this stage, EFEE has active members in 15 EU member states and in Norway. In addition to Ireland, the other member states involved are Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Malta, the Netherlands, Romania, Slovakia, Sweden and the UK. Between them, the member organisations cover about two and a half million teachers and lecturers. All phases of education are covered, from pre-school to university and research. While most of the members of EFEE operate predominantly in the public sector, there are also representatives of privately managed, but state-funded, schools and colleges.

One of the reasons for the relative lateness of Education employers on the scene in Brussels is that the identity of the employer in education is sometimes rather confused. Is it the Government, which so often holds the purse strings? Or the local or regional authority, which is often the legal employer? Or the school or college itself, where day-to-day management decisions are made? The truth is that very often the role of the employer is found at all three levels, giving Education a complexity which is simply not found in private business. Reflecting this complexity, the membership of EFEE itself is rather mixed. Associations of local or regional authorities or of school principals sit alongside representatives of ministries of education from the countries with more centralised systems. I had expected at the outset that the chemistry between those from centralised systems and those from decentralised systems would be difficult, but so far, there have not been problems of that nature, except that I have observed that the ministries tend to

pay their membership fees later than the associations!

EFEE has two main roles. First of all, as a "social partner" organisation recognised by the Commission, we are consulted on a wide range of issues of interest to us both as employers and as providers of education services. In this role, we aim to become the acknowledged voice of education employers in Brussels and to gain influence over policy developments in the fields of employment and education and training. Secondly, with our trade union partner organisation ETUCE (European Trade Union Committee for Education), we will shortly be given the go-ahead from the European Commission to form a "sectoral social dialogue committee" for Education. This will give us the responsibility for negotiations at European level, which could, in principle, lead to EU-wide agreements.

There are nearly 40 such sectoral social dialogue committees in existence, covering sectors such as Agriculture, Railways and Construction. In the public sector, there are already social dialogue committees for Health and for Local and Regional Government. So a committee for Education hardly breaks new ground and indeed could be seen as a long overdue filling of an illogical gap.

An idea of the *subject matter* of the social dialogue committee can be found in the initial work programme that EFEE and ETUCE agreed last year. There are three main themes and some individual topics. The themes are quality in education; the impact on education of demographic change and, the EU education and training process for 2010 to 2020 (known as "post-Lisbon" – a reference to the 2000 *Lisbon Strategy*). The topics include the

contribution of Education to the current economic crisis; issues relating to stress and harassment and public/private developments in education.

As to the type of *outcome* that social dialogue at EU level produces, agreements between social partners usually take rather *soft* forms, such as Joint Declarations aimed at policy makers or Joint Guidelines aimed at national or local social partners. Occasionally however, agreements can result in legally binding directives, but only if the European social partners agree and the Commission, the Council of Ministers and the Parliament all consent. This procedure has recently been applied to a "cross-sectoral" agreement covering all sectors on the subject of Parental Leave and to a Health sector agreement covering injuries from "needlesticks and other sharps". It is interesting to note in this latter case, that the reason that the Health employers agreed to a binding directive was that it was clear that had they not done so, the Commission would have proposed a wider-ranging directive on their own initiative. In other words, the social partners can be manoeuvred by the Commission into going further than they would have done if left to their own devices. But this is usually reckoned to be better than the alternative of a Commission-drafted proposal without the direct involvement of the social partners and their closer links to the realities of the workplace.

Education is not a "legal competence" of the EU, unlike agriculture, energy and transport to name just a few sectors where the EU has treaty-based powers to regulate at European level. That does not of course stop the EU from having a huge influence on education and training. There are EU benchmarks agreed by the Council of Education Ministers which are an attempt to co-ordinate national policies from Brussels on a voluntary basis, known as the "open method of co-ordination". There are long-established EU initiatives and programmes such as Erasmus and Leonardo and increasingly there is an emphasis in EU policy on VET, vocational education and training. Indeed Michael Moriarty, courtesy of EFEE, spoke at a major Commission conference on the subject of *New Skills for New Jobs* in Brussels last December.

This is undoubtedly a good time for Education interests to be active in Brussels. Recently EFEE, like other

social partner organisations, was consulted by the Commission on the strategic direction of the EU over the next ten years, EU 2020. At the heart of the Commission's vision for the development of Europe, is the recognition that we can compete in the global economy only through the superior application of knowledge. This of course puts a huge premium on the quality of education and on sound links between education and training and employers. Education interests therefore have strong cards to play in the arguments about where the public spending axe will fall that will be played out soon in most countries, if not already as in Ireland. Having such strong cards does not of course protect one from the discovery that the rules of the game are being changed by the finance ministry, but it is our job collectively to make sure that the ability of Education to ensure a strong economic and social future is not damaged unduly in the most challenging economic situation since the 1930s.

In Dublin on 27 April, our trade union colleagues ETUCE will hold a seminar on the impact of the crisis on Education. EFEE will be represented at this seminar and we will argue that while no public service can be completely immune when public expenditure has to be cut on a significant scale, reductions to the "front line" in education should be avoided if at all possible. This seminar is an example of a range of joint activity with ETUCE. For example, IVEA is a partner in an ETUCE project which is looking at the development of competences in VET teachers/lecturers. EFEE is also involved in a project about how the foundations

for lifelong learning are set up in school.

For a new organisation, EFEE has travelled quite far. But to make our voice count in Brussels, we have a lot more to do. In particular, we need to recruit more countries. In the countries where we already have members, we need to ensure that all phases of education are covered. We need more input from some of our members to match that already demonstrated by IVEA.

Whether one is EU-friendly or EU-sceptic, Brussels cannot safely be ignored. Social dialogue at European level gives us a chance to engage and to build up a sound reputation as the basis for real influence where it counts.

Charles Nolda was the initial general secretary of EFEE, informally from 2007 and formally from February 2009 until the end of March 2010. He is now a consultant supporting his successor, Bianka Stege (from the Netherlands). He has been active in European social dialogue since retiring in 2004 as the managing director of the national employers' organisation for local government in England and Wales.

IVEA is a member of EFEE and the IVEA General Secretary was recently appointed to the EFEE Executive Committee. IVEA is represented at EFEE meetings by Michael Moriarty and Deirdre Keogh with Ms Keogh recently appointed to EFEE's Audit Committee. Both Michael and Deirdre have separately addressed conferences and meetings in Brussels concerned to the development of education and the progression of EFEE's objectives.



Bianca, Charles and Nana – members of EFEE



COISTE GAIRMOIDEACHAIS CHONTAE ÁTHA CLIATH
COUNTY DUBLIN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION COMMITTEE

The arrival of Community National Schools

By David Campbell, Principal, Scoil Ghráinne



This June marks the completion of the first full academic year of the Community National School model of primary schools; a model that has been developed to meet the educational needs of a modern, 21st century Ireland.

While the Catholic Church has played and continues to play a very positive, worthwhile and important role in primary education in this country, it is, as Archbishop Martin recently stated an “historical hangover” that sees the Church continuing to run over 90% of primary schools in the State. This is often seen as an untenable situation in communities where the Catholic population is in the minority.

The Community National School came about to meet the changed and changing needs of modern Irish society. We are no longer the homogenous, white, Catholic, freckled people that we were. Rather, we have strengthened our society considerably by welcoming people from all over the world to our shores. We are developing a culture of many diverse and distinct heritages; communities that draw strength from those differences and celebrates them and their inclusion in the ever broadening concept of ‘Irishness’. This, along with providing the best quality education to our pupils, is where I see the Community National School model

and certainly Scoil Ghráinne playing an important role.

Part of this new society is a multitude of religions and families that want an education that supports their children in their own faith/belief system journeys. Article 42 of our Constitution describes education as “religious and moral, intellectual, physical and social” and as such there is, I believe, an onus on schools to assist the parents in the formation of their children in their own belief system. This is where the Community National School and our ethos of equality and inclusion come in. Rather than establishing a multiplicity of schools catering each to their own belief system, and the unnecessary ‘ghettoisation’ of young children and the communities that form around them, it seems much more sensible to cater to the educational (inclusive of religious/belief-system) needs of all the children of a community under one roof. We aim to provide, where possible to the different belief systems of our student population by first and foremost sharing instruction in what we have in common and augmenting that with a number of individual lessons for each belief system, as feasible and appropriate.

Religious education was easily accomplished in the past when the majority of families were Catholic and where virtually

100% of the children in a school were of one religion. However we have moved beyond this now and have a situation whereby children of other belief systems attending a Catholic school are left in ‘limbo’ for the duration of RE classes. This is an unsustainable situation for the children and the teachers charged with their education. To attempt to establish a State-run primary school which provides a multi-belief programme is, as far as I am aware, a unique endeavour of any country and the State should be congratulated in creating a model of school that recognises and cherishes the role of faith or a belief system in the totality of a person’s existence and seeks to assist parents in educating their children in such an holistic manner.

Along with our innovative multi-belief programme, another aspect of our model that sets us apart is the involvement of the local VEC, in our case, County Dublin VEC. This advantage is realised in the wealth of expertise and professionalism that we as a school can tap into. To have access to professionals with years of experience in areas such as HR, buildings, ICT, Finance etc. is invaluable to any school and it is an expertise that I have called upon time and again. The priority for any school staff and principal is, and should be, teaching and learning. Therefore, to have access to as highly competent and qualified professionals as the staff of County Dublin VEC ensures our priorities remain where they should be.

In looking back over Scoil Ghráinne’s first year of existence, I feel a great sense of gratitude to have been involved in the establishment of a new school and a new model of school. It has been a wonderful experience for myself and all the staff. It’s an opportunity most teachers don’t get - a chance to instil something of yourself in a fledgling school and have an influence that only founders can have. I also look back over the year with great pride in all we have achieved and excitement in what next year will have to offer. Go mbeidh ár dara bliain comh maith agus a raibh an chéad!



Pupils in Scoil Choilm, Christmas 2009

County Tipperary's Ryan Youth Orchestra open National Festival in Dublin



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

The fifty-eight piece County Tipperary (SR) Ryan Youth Orchestra (CTRYO) opened the 15th National Festival of Youth Orchestras at the National Concert Hall, Dublin on Saturday, 13th February. It presented an exciting programme to the delight of an audience of orchestral enthusiasts and musicians from all over Ireland from Donegal to Wexford. The CTRYO, based in Tipperary Town and conducted by Michael John Ryan, caters for young musicians from all over Co. Tipperary and the neighbouring counties of Limerick and Cork. The orchestra was one of eight chosen to perform at the festival's two concerts. In all, there are one hundred and ten youth orchestras in the Irish Association of Youth Orchestras – the organising body for the Festival.

Support for the Tipperary Orchestra was led by county representatives of State and Education – Dr Martin Mansergh T.D. Minister for State, Councillor Liam Ahearn, Chairperson, South Tipperary County Council, Ms Fionuala McGeever, CEO, South Tipperary VEC, Eileen Condon, Adult Education Officer, South Tipperary VEC, and Lisa Kavanagh, Youth Officer, South Tipperary VEC. Parents, families and friends travelled by train, car and bus to support the young musicians who performed magnificently, drawing tremendous applause for their music.

Amid the fifty-eight orchestra members, all of whom are students attending schools and colleges throughout the region, were musicians who come from as far away as Hungary, Greece, Mexico, Australia and the U.S.A. as well as Kacper Krym and Anna Kulish who come from Poland and the Ukraine, respectively, and who now live in Cahir and attend Coláiste Dún Iascaigh.

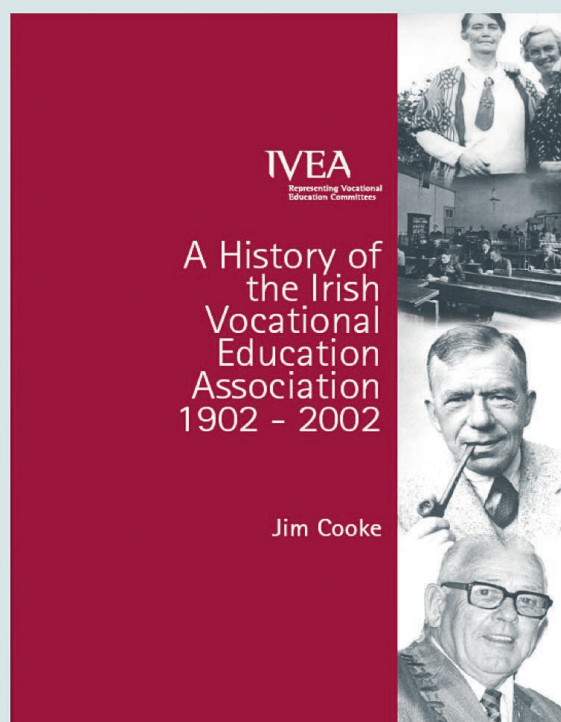
The members of the orchestra whose ages range from under twelve to twenty plus, were supported in the percussion section by former members Oliver Corbett, Jonathan McCarthy and James Ryan all of whom performed with the CTRYO in previous trips to the National Concert Hall and on trips abroad. The orchestra rehearses in St. Ailbe's School, Tipperary Town, every Friday from September to May and performs in six to eight concerts each season.



A History of the Irish Vocational Education Association

This history traces the development of Irish technical education from the first Mechanics' Institute in Dublin in 1824, to the first Technical School (Kevin St.) in 1887, the Vocational Schools of the 1930s and the Community Colleges of the 1980s. It also traces the development of the Technological Colleges and the Regional Technical Colleges. The emphasis is on the century 1902 – 2002.

Jim Cooke vividly describes the people who worked for the cause of vocational and technical education – their idealism, vision, leadership, commitment and sense of mission.



Buy your copy from IVEA Head Office
Cost is €30 + €8 p&p.

IVEA

Representing Vocational
Education Committees



Galway Transition Year Students are 'Lego' champions and on the way to the US finals

Eight Transition Year students from Coláiste na Coiribe, Galway City VEC, won the Irish Robotics Championships which was held in Radisson Hotel, Galway on 20 February last.

They are now set to represent Ireland in the International "First Lego League" competition in Atlanta, Georgia, this April, contested by 120,000 students worldwide.

- The first part of the competition involves the building of a Lego robot which the students nicknamed 'Gordon'. Once the robot was built they had to programme it to carry out a number of precise tasks, such as lifting and moving objects, within a set time allowed.
- The second major part of the competition involves a research project where the theme this year was transportation. This task is designed to encourage students to engage in social projects and the students this year investigated the issue of traffic congestion in Galway city.

The students had to perform a number of presentations to a number of judges about their research project, the technology used in the robot and areas such



as teamwork initiatives. The students excelled in this area and proved themselves worthy winners of the competition. The school staff, students, VEC and wider community are delighted with their success and wish them well in Atlanta in April.

Transition Year students involved in the project are: Tadhg Ó Conchubhair, Aodh Ó Domhnaill, Eoghan Mac Cuarta, Aedan Ó Gallachóir, David Sciascia,

Conchubhar Ó hAonghusa, Conchúir Mac Domhnaill and Cathal Seoighe. The group are supported by team mentor teacher Eoin de Blacam, SAP and the Medtronic Foundation, as part of the Galway Science and Technology Festival. Coláiste na Coiribe students spent a number of months working on the project for the Irish Robotics Championships and are now busy at work improving their project even further for their trip to the world Lego finals in Atlanta, USA.



Errigal College win €5,000 in the AIB - Better Ireland Programme

ERRIGAL College, Letterkenny, recently won €5,000 for music equipment in the "Better Ireland Programme" for 2010. AIB branches all over the country make €10,000 available to social groups to further enhance and develop their provision of services.

Music teacher at Errigal College, Margaret McAteer, takes up the story:

"During the First term of school this year, I was fortunate enough to have a 'light-bulb'

moment, and swiftly checked out the AIB webpage, where guidelines were given on the procedure for applying for the 'Better Ireland' funding. So, without further ado, I applied online.

"Then in January 2010, on our first day back after the Christmas holidays, there was the letter from Letterkenny AIB with the news that we were shortlisted for funding. The letter indicated that Errigal College, along with two other institutions in the locality, would receive €2,000, €3,000 or €5,000.

Whoever got the most votes would get the largest sum of money. Voting took place between mid-February and mid-March.

"The funding will go a long long way in equipping the Music department with much-needed resources".

Margaret McAteer also expressed her gratitude to AIB for running the scheme and to all the students, staff, parents and friends who moved on the idea and made the success a reality for Errigal College.



COISTE GAIRMOIDEACHAIS CHONTAE ÁTHA CLIATH
COUNTY DUBLIN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION COMMITTEE

County Dublin VEC – Festival of Music, 2010

By Michael T. Stanley, Riverdale Community College



ON 8th March, the National Concert Hall played host to the Co. Dublin twelfth Festival of Music. This event is one that brings together the entire community of Co. Dublin VEC, administrative and teaching staff, parents, students, the VEC Committee and esteemed guests to cel-

ebate the musical talents of the students from the various schools and colleges within the VEC.

This initiative first began in 1999 when two teachers from Riverdale Community, Mr Patrick Scarlett and Mr Michael Stanley,

approached the then CEO, Mr Pat O'Connor suggesting the concept of putting on just such a festival. As a result of his support, the Festival has now become an annual event. This year's event was held as a tribute to Mr O'Connor as part of the events held on his retirement as CEO. His successor, Ms Marie Griffin, publicly acknowledged Mr O'Connor's support and faith in the event spanning over the many intervening years.

Performances ranged over a variety of talents – from concert bands to choirs, traditional Irish bands, solists, gospel choirs, classical musicians, and rock bands.

The night itself was yet another energetic, enthusiastic display of the musical talents mentioned and is a clear example of the excellent talents and efforts which are easily found, not just in the Co. Dublin VEC system but throughout the general VEC sector in Ireland. The date for next year's Festival is already set for Tuesday, 8 March.



Ground-breaking success for St Peter's College and Co. Meath VEC with the three-part hit TV series *The School*

By Deirdre Keogh, Development Officer, IVEA



Coiste Gairmoideachais Chontae na Mí
Fiúntas agus Nuálíocht in Oideachas
County Meath VEC
Excellence and Innovation in Education

THE recent ground-breaking television documentary *The School* offered unprecedented access into the life of St Peter's College, Dunboyne, Co. Meath. It charted the life of an entire school year following and providing a real life insight into the day-to-day lives and experiences of students, staff, management and the wider school community. Its success has been widely commended both within the education sector and acknowledged through public interest programmes where some of "the stars" met with modern-day celebrities from *The Tubridy Show*; *The Afternoon Show* and shared their experiences in the aftermath of *The School's* public airing. **The courage and professionalism of those involved at all levels in this ground-breaking series has, and continues to be, commended by those who scratch their heads and ask "why didn't we think of doing that"?**

St. Peter's College is a relatively new school, built on a greenfield site in 1994 by Co. Meath VEC. Mr Eamonn Gaffney was appointed as its first principal and has developed the school from its initial seventy students and seven teachers to its current enrolment of 970 second level pupils and 350 PLC students. Staff including teachers, office, support and SNAs now number almost 100. The Board of Management of the school has representatives from the VEC, the Diocese, the community, minority religions, teachers and parents.

St Peter's College Principal, Mr Eamonn Gaffney agreed to be interviewed for this edition of *IVEA News* to give an insight into the process which led to the decision and the making of the three-part television series *The School*. He also reflected on his experience and feelings about the programme following its release.



Two St Peter's students meeting UN General Secretary Ban Ki-moon during his short visit to Ireland. Also pictured are An Taoiseach, Mr Brian Cowan T.D., Mr Micheál Martin T.D., Minister for Foreign Affairs and Mr Dick Roche T.D., Minister for European Affairs and students from Coláiste Bhríde, Carnew, Co. Wicklow

So where did the concept of the series *The School* come from?

Mr Gaffney and his staff took a huge risk in opening the doors of St. Peter's College to the cameras. When asked about the process by which they came to the decision to allow *The School* to be made, Mr Gaffney explained that the film company "Scratch Films" and in particular Liam McGrath and Tony Deegan approached him in April 2008. They proposed to make a documentary on the experience of school life for students. Initially Liam and Tony thought they would approach a number of schools to participate in the programme but following a number of meetings with Eamonn, Deputy Principals Maureen Murray and Liam Greene, the counselling team and a group of teachers, it was decided to base the documentary solely on St Peter's College.

Getting everyone 'on board'

The next hurdle to overcome was discussing the project with the whole staff. A number of meetings were held with staff and following a detailed process of consultation, the staff agreed to filming proceeding. Throughout this process, the student council was involved in the discussion. The Parents' Association and Board of Management also discussed the making of the series and whilst the consultation process was extensive, Mr

Gaffney felt such a venture could not go ahead without everyone concerned to it being completely on board.

One key element in the consultation process was the establishment of a school monitoring committee. This voluntary group of staff held a variety of opinions on the project varying from wholehearted support to being somewhat sceptical of the project. In retrospect, Mr Gaffney felt that this committee in highlighting concerns and issues on an ongoing basis, proved hugely helpful in informing the process as filming went on throughout the year.

So the cameras roll in!

When the cameras and crew joined the school in September 2008 they blended in very quickly. Paula Rouse and Mairead Tucker arrived in school everyday – camera and notebook in hand. They spent considerable time building relationships with students and staff deciding early on, to establish a "Diary Cam". They imported a prefab where the Diary camera was set up so that students and staff could visit the "Diary Room" whenever they felt they had something to say. Mr Gaffney reflected that he was never sure what would emerge from this idea but it certainly proved very insightful on how students viewed the school.



Maureen Murray, Deputy Principal, and Eamonn Gaffney, Principal, St Peter's College, Dunboyne

One of the staff who featured in the film was the Deputy Principal, Maureen Murray. She stressed in her interview that "I do more than check uniforms"! The cameras followed her most mornings for the first fifteen minutes of each day. It was during this time that her daily routine of checking uniforms largely takes place.

Both Principal and Deputy were asked what the most difficult thing about the experience was. They both agreed – "the airing of the programme". They had sleepless nights worrying about the students featured in the series, how they would be received and would there be any fallout for individuals that they had not considered. Thankfully – there wasn't!

The first episode of *The School* aired on RTE on Monday, 4 January. Almost immediately the flood of public response began. The overwhelmingly positive reactions were a huge relief to management, staff, parents and students. Cards, letters, texts, emails and phone messages flooded into the school and to individual staff members – unanimously praising the programme for its honesty, openness and bravery. Teachers in schools around the country appreciated that the complexity of their work was openly displayed and the public could understand, first-hand, how teaching today is very different from the experiences we had of school.

The press also commented widely on the programme. Eamonn was concerned that much of the public debate, focused on the ethics of exposing students in the programme – rather than generating a serious debate on modern-day education issues.

Students were insightful in their responses to *The School*. James, who has dyslexia,

said "he wanted people to know how frustrating it is to live with dyslexia". Adam, the Leaving Certificate student with the great voice, felt the programme had allowed him to reflect on his behaviour – and positively learn from it.

The Tubridy and Afternoon Shows

Staff including Eamonn, Maureen, Caroline Toole, Paul O'Leary with Ellen Cogavin (Board of Management) and a large group of students were invited to a special airing of *The Tubridy Show*. The entire programme was dedicated to discussion on the series. Students who featured in the series including James Hanningan (who went onto Actuarial studies as his career), Claire Darragh (now studying nursing) and Adam Buckkilla (now studying Business) were interviewed in detail, about life after *The School*. The three emphasised how school had been a positive experience and facilitated them in reaching their goals. Ryan Tubridy's professionalism and interest in each of the students and staff during and directly following the airing of the programme, was most appreciated by those who took part and may have been slightly nervous being interviewed on national radio for the first time!

That afternoon Cian O'Mahony (fifth year student); Mairead Watters (fourth year student) and Ms Maureen Murray (Deputy Principal) were hosted on RTE's *The Afternoon Show*. Some general questions were discussed in the pre-planning stage of the show but essentially the show was a live take. Cian highlighted the positive experience he had had in Transition Year and how it contributed to his personal development and maturity. Rebecca cleverly remembered to advertise the Transition Year book – *Twenty Fifteen*; a collection of prose, poems, songs and artwork with contributors



Caroline Toole, Maths and Science Teacher at St Peter's College – the lady who likes exams!

including students, scientists, politicians and literary greats such as Sebastian Barry, Seamus Heaney, Anne Enright and Joseph O'Connor.

Audiences with Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary General and President Mary McAleese

Two St Peter's students had the opportunity of meeting UN General Secretary Ban Ki-moon during his short visit to Ireland. They presented him with a copy of *Twenty Fifteen* – a student response to the Millenium Development Goal: the eradication of poverty.

Following on from such lauded success, fifth year students from St Peter's College and Colaiste Bhríde Carnew, Co. Wicklow were honoured by an audience with President Mary McAleese in Áras an Uachtaráin. Winners of the prestigious title of *Young Social Innovators* for 2009, the students presented the President with a copy of *Twenty Fifteen* as well as a copy of their 'Poverty Week' Resource which earned them the title of "Young Social Innovators".

So, would they do it all over again?

Now that the exhaustion of January and February as eased, Mr Gaffney said "he would like to revisit *The School* in five or ten years to see how things have changed. The reaction from people throughout the country by letter, email and phone was enormous. Past pupils, parents and everyone who contacted the school following the programme were fulsome in their praise". **After the first programme aired, the school received a letter from a mother of four teenagers who said it was the first programme she and all her children watched with equal interest. She said it opened the discussion of school in their family in a healthy way.**

Mr Gaffney, Ms Murray, Mr Greene, the staff and students of St Peter's College wish to thank Liam McGrath, Tony Deegan, Paula Rouse and Mairead Tucker for their professionalism in making and editing *The School*. They also acknowledge the support from RTE Commission Editor, Mairead Ni Nucaín, and extend a special word of thanks to Mr Peter Kierans CEO and Co. Meath VEC. Finally, a particular word of deepest appreciation is extended to the family of Darren Sutherland RIP who allowed their son's participation in the programme to be included.

Ballyfermot College celebrates incredible BAFTA and OSCAR success

By Paul Mahon, IT and Communications Officer, IVEA

IN all the reams of newsprint, radio and TV publicity that followed Richie Baneham's BAFTA and OSCAR wins, one point was rarely explored – that being **the progress of Ballyfermot College of Further Education which has been astounding since its formation in 1979.**

"The success of our graduates has lifted the community as a whole" says Maureen Conway, Acting Principal of Ballyfermot College of Further Education. *"People have been stopping staff members in the street and sending us text messages. It's been incredible especially considering all the education cuts and the general malaise in Irish society"* she continues before revealing that a letter from President McAleese arrived this morning. This success is far from the overnight variety however, with the College's award winners spanning classes from 1993 to 2004.

So is there any magic ingredient that other VEC colleges can steal with pride from Ballyfermot? *"Good teaching is the core"* states Maureen Conway who also believes that buy-in from the local community has been very important. *"We let a certain amount of local students in but that's only the start of it. Our teachers and students volunteer on a weekly basis, to run two programmes for local primary school students – 'Art for Success' and 'Animation for Success'. We even set*



(L-R): Kevin Devine Vice Principal, Jerome Morrissey Former Principal, Darragh O'Connell, Oscar Winner Richie Baneham (holding the BAFTA award), Tom Moore, Nicky Phelan and Maureen Conway Acting Principal

up a film show at the conclusion of the Animation course with red carpets, award presentations, etc."

Despite all the positive publicity, it hasn't always been this way for Ballyfermot College. When *"Give Up Yer Aul Sins"* was made in 2002 by Brownbag Films (a company formed by Darragh O'Connell and Cathal Gaffney), Maureen Conway recalls *"endless ringing around"* trying in vain to garner some publicity. Her phone bills haven't been quite so big of late, but other successful graduates still haven't been picked up by the media whirlwind.

They include Wallis Bird winning "Best Irish Female" at the 2010 Meteor Ireland Music Awards and Andrew Kavanagh's *Kavaleer Productions* winning a Digital Media Award for "Best Use of Film or Animation" on *Hasan Everywhere*.

Thankfully Ballyfermot's former graduates haven't let the success go to their heads and forgotten where they came from. Gareth Lee, Course Co-ordinator for the Advanced Diploma in Animation, organised a seminar just after the BAFTAs, where all four of the OSCAR nominees returned to their *alma mater*. The night was split into two parts; firstly Richie Baneham critiqued students' work and gave a lecture on his four and a half years working on *Avatar*, including technical aspects and new ways of generating special effects. Richie was then joined by his fellow nominees Darragh O'Connell, Tom Moore and Nicky Phelan for a panel discussion, all this taking place while his BAFTA was being passed around the audience. *"The whole night was amazing, very technical but also greatly inspiring"* says Conway who added that Tom Moore even rescheduled a flight to the US so he could attend.



The Panel in session at Ballyfermot College's own OSCAR night

So how does Ballyfermot College intend to continue its success? *"The quality is still there"* concludes Maureen Conway...*"our graduates work is being accepted worldwide and the success of their predecessors can only improve this recognition"*.



Counting the Cost of Cuts

By Bernadette Maria Brady, Director, AONTAS



The traditional resilience of the adult and community education sector is being sorely tested by the challenges of the current recession in Ireland. At its AGM in May 2009, AONTAS celebrated forty years of Irish adult and community education and took the opportunity to illustrate and record its development. During those four decades, the sector has faced many challenges ranging from survival on minimal resources courtesy of the work of the many excellent volunteers who delivered the service, to more optimistic times following the publication of the White Paper, *Learning for Life* in 2000, to the current period of uncertainty following the collapse of the economy.

The sudden and devastating collapse of the Irish economy came as a shock to all of us and the budgetary measures introduced by the Government in October 2008 and again in April 2009, meant reductions in resources across the board. In the April 2009 Budget, the adult and community education service suffered cuts like everyone else but it could be said that the Government did recognise the vital role adult education had to play in its provision for extra places in further education under an 'activation' measure. This consisted of providing 6,910 places mostly in higher education with an additional 1500 places on the Post Leaving Certificate Programme. However the rate at which unemployment levels have risen has rapidly swamped the capacity of the service to meet demand and has raised questions about the appropriateness of these interventions.

AONTAS's Information Referral Service showed an increase in demand over 2008 of 500% by the end of October 2009 with a total of 5,217 queries dealt with by the service. By the end of the year numbers had risen to almost 7,000. The majority of these were newly unemployed people and a staggering 67% were men. This is a major turnaround for a service that is traditionally accessed by far more women than men. Research has shown that adults with higher levels of qualifications are the people most likely

to pursue additional learning activities throughout their lives, but the recent trends emerging from the referral service show that 81% of all individuals seeking to return to education last year have been out of education for more than ten years. 52% of this cohort has been out of education for more than 20 years and a further 4% have stated that they had not been involved in any educational activity for more than 30 years. This data demonstrates that Ireland still has a long way to go in the process of embedding a culture of lifelong learning in its 'educational psyche'. During the 'boom years', AONTAS consistently drew attention to the fact that while Ireland had the lowest level of unemployment across Europe it also had the highest level of low skilled, low qualified workers and that these workers would be the most vulnerable in the event of a rise in unemployment. And so it has proved to be.

The labour market activation measures put in place after the April 2009 Budget had disappointing levels of uptake perhaps because they were pitched at too high a level. A quarter of unemployed people contacting the AONTAS Information Referral Service stated that the courses available did not suit their needs. One third of the inquirers feel that there needed to be greater choice and diversification of provision at local level and more than one quarter felt that there are few places to progress to after doing short courses thus questioning their value. The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) believes that labour market activation measures need to address adult literacy, numeracy and basic skills development. It further argues that targeted and appropriate activation measures to address the unacceptable low literacy levels in Irish society are cost effective to individuals, their families, society and the economy. *The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs* recommended in 2007, that basic skills (in particular literacy) 'should be prioritised and embedded into all publicly funded education and training provision in so far as possible.' The Government has adopted this recommen-

dation as policy. It is essential that these issues are acknowledged, recognised and addressed in the context of delivery of services funded under the new 20 million activation measure announced in the 2010 Budget.

Together with the soaring demand for places on adult education and training courses, adult and community education services are coming under serious pressure as a result of the moratorium on the recruitment of personnel in the public service. The current definition of frontline staff in the education sector is confined to those who are teaching in the classroom. However the complexity of the adult and community education service is such that many of those involved in it have managerial, co-ordination or administrative roles such as Adult Education Officers, Adult Literacy Organisers, Guidance staff and so on. For example 68% of adult literacy tutors are volunteers who need to be trained and supported by the Adult Literacy Organisers. If these Organisers are absent for reasons of sick/maternity leave or retirement they cannot be replaced, thus reducing the capacity of the service to deliver a quality service at a time when it is most needed. AONTAS has urged the Government to revisit its definition of frontline staff to take account of the complexity of the adult and community education service as a matter of urgency.

While the lack of coherent information and suitable courses to meet their needs remain key issues for adult learners, the recent changes in financial supports for adults wishing to pursue further and higher education courses introduced in Budget 2010 are proving to be a major stumbling blocks. The loss of the maintenance grant for adult learners who qualify for the Back to Education Allowance will effectively make third level education unaffordable. At an Adult Education Clinic organised by AONTAS to close the Adult Learners' Festival on 26 February last, learners from all over the country described their plight to the Minister for Lifelong Learning and Party Spokespeople on Education.

Many of these learners may need to give up their studies as they find it impossible to finance them. This decision introduced in Budget 2010 contradicts a forward thinking upskilling/ retraining strategy and Smart Economy approach promised by the Government.

Lifelong learning is a key instrument for addressing the challenges of a recession. Ireland's previous economic success was attributed to a number of factors, one in particular being the educated workforce which provided a basis for a knowledge economy. Investing in our existing strengths, in order to transform the current situation, is vital not only to economic survival and renewal but also to the development of a strong civil society based on equality and democracy. Re-skilling and up-skilling are essential; so too is providing a variety of educational opportunities, both formal and non-formal to enable people to regain their confidence and self esteem and to explore new options in a rapidly changing world.

The key strengths of the adult and community education sector are its resilience, its capacity to respond to the needs of adult learners and its flexibility in adapting to changing circumstances. However its development is hampered by its lack of vis-



Minister for Lifelong Learning, Seán Haughey, T.D., Berni Brady Director of AONTAS and others at the Adult Education Clinic event on 26 February 2010 during the Adult Learners Festival

ibility, the erosion of its resources and the fragmentation which is endemic in the system. AONTAS has called for a much greater level of collaboration at a Departmental level in order to develop coherent strategies for the delivery of a seamless service which would provide realistic progression routes for adult learners. It will closely monitor how the recent changes in government departments could bring that about, in particular how the transfer of training to the newly named Department of Education and Skills will work.

AONTAS members have called on the Government to recognise the

role adult and community education has to play in the renewal of the Irish economy and civil society and ensure that the core work of the sector is sustained through the recession. Already providers on the ground are collaborating in an effort to serve the needs of adults especially those who have been hit hardest by the economic collapse and are providing good value for money. AONTAS's work for the coming year will be to support that work by ensuring that the voice of the sector is heard and translated into government policy, and to publicly demonstrate its value through its promotional strategies.



City of Cork VEC

Coiste Gairmoideachais Chathair Chorcaí

Tutors from City of Cork and County Kilkenny VECs receive City & Guilds – Medal for Excellence awards



Anita Kirby, Tutor at St John's Central College of Further Education & Training in Cork and Donal Costigan, Lecturer at the V.T.O.S. scheme in Kilkenny were presented with a coveted City & Guilds Medal for Excellence for their outstanding performances as teachers of Hairdressing and IT. Anita and Donal were presented with their awards by the then Tánaiste and current Minister for Education and Skills, Mary Coughlan T.D. at the City & Guilds Irish awards ceremony held in Dublin recently.

City & Guilds, an awarding body for vocational qualifications, has run the annual Medals for Excellence awards for over 125 years (since 1879), rewarding talented educational professionals and students who display exceptional standards and outstanding achievement.



Donal Costigan (far right), Anita Kirby (second from right), Minister for Education and Skills, Mary Coughlan T.D, Brid Healy (City & Guilds, Country Manager – Ireland) and other award winners



“Bonar, Wild and Delicious” – Traveller Development Project and Kerry Education Service

By Michelle Anne Houlihan, Community Education Facilitator, Kerry Education Service



(L-R): Helena Clarke, Molly McCarthy, Winnie McDonagh, Kevin Dundon, Mary O'Brien, Alice Virmonde, Jimmy Deenihan T.D.

In 2008, the Kerry Travellers' Development Project and Kerry Education Service initiated a Community Education Programme in Listowel. This project was undertaken in conjunction with a Traveller Women's Group with key objectives including cooking skills, nutrition, healthy eating, quality ingredients and healthy meals for the family. Little did we know that this would end up being so much more!

North Kerry Traveller Women's Group and Kerry Travellers' Development Project were delighted to introduce their latest piece of work, **“Bonar, Wild and Delicious”**, a cookbook with traditional as well as non-traditional recipes reflecting the food culture within the community. The group were pleased to have the advice and support of one of the most celebrated and respected chefs in Ireland and abroad Darina Allen, who wrote the foreword. Her philosophy on food, the importance of seasonal and local ingredients and the cultural aspects of food mir-

rors the process captured in this project. Ms Alice Virmonde was the group tutor. Her role was to facilitate the group to learn new cooking skills and to research traditional Traveller recipes. Alice also wrote this book to reflect the culture, stories and experiences of Travellers as told to her during the sessions with the Listowel Traveller Women. Jimmy Deenihan T.D. officially launched the book as part of Listowel's Food Fair Week.

To facilitate a project such as this to achieve its targets, a core group of people were involved in supporting the initiative. Listowel Community College and in particular, it's Principal Sean McCarthy and Director of Adult Education Angela Kearney. The “Book Committee” dedicated hours to ensuring the project was set up, editing and liaising with publishers and printers. But the main characters in this story are the women, members of the Traveller Women's Group that started to meet in Listowel some four years ago.

On a beautiful summers evening in Listowel Community College we feasted on the dishes that the Women's Group prepared. We reflected on the journey that we had travelled on. Yes, numerous new culinary and technical skills have been learned but more importantly, an appreciation of time and company and the value of meals in bringing family and friends together was the most important lesson learned.

This project was co-funded by: Kerry Education Service, Health Service Executive and Kerry Travellers' Development Project.

The Book costs €10 and can be purchased by contacting Kerry Travellers Development Project at 066-7120054 or email ktd@eircom.net

The Listowel Traveller Women's Group has decided to donate any funds raised from this initiative to the *Make a Wish Foundation*.

IVEA and NALA hold Joint Conference on Integrating Literacy into Further Education Courses

By Pat O'Mahony, Education Research Officer, IVEA

ON 1 December 2009, IVEA and NALA organised a joint conference on integrating literacy in further education. The conference was opened by David Treacy, Education Officer, City of Dublin VEC, who also chaired the morning's plenary session. Around 80 participants took part in the conference, including vocational teachers, adult literacy practitioners, students, college principals and programme managers.

"This has helped me to turn what I saw as 'problems' into opportunities and solutions!"

...Participant at IVEA-NALA Conference on Integrating Literacy.

Guest speakers in the morning's plenary session included:

- Dr Helen Casey, Co-Director the National Research and Development Centre in literacy and numeracy (NRDC) in England, who presented evidence from a major NRDC research project into 'embedding' or integrating literacy, demonstrating its effectiveness;
- Kathleen Cramer and Dr Liz McSkeane, who presented the findings from the *Living Literacy* research project, which investigated whole-organisation approach to literacy in Newbridge Youth Training and Development Centre (NYTDC);
- Ann Hegarty and Dr Maggie Feeley, who presented NALA-commissioned research into *Literacy-friendly further education at Level 5*, carried out in partnership with Liberties College, Dublin;
- Michael King, Principal of Liberties College, who spoke about the college's experience of addressing language and literacy issues as part of a whole-college inclusion strategy, with particular reference to the experience and learning from the NALA-Liberties College research project; and...
- Siobhan Carroll, PLC student in Liberties College, who spoke about her experience of returning to education as an adult, illustrating the critical role played by community education provision as well as the importance of inclusive, empathic, literacy-aware approaches at all phases of formal education.

Afternoon workshops centred on presentations from practitioners on how they integrated literacy development into vocational programmes. The workshops included information on and practical examples of: **what the vocational teacher can do** to help overcome literacy barriers to learning the core subject and to help students develop literacy; **professional development** programmes in integrating literacy – for the vocational teacher, literacy tutors and management; **a partnership approach** between adult literacy and vocational services and practitioners; **strategies and programmes for enabling access** to further education courses; and Integrated assessment and induction.

A number of key themes emerged from the research and practice inputs and discussions, and these are summarised below.

What is 'integrating literacy'?

'Integrating literacy' means designing and delivering education and training programmes in a way that develops language, literacy and numeracy as part of and at the same time as learning the core subject. This does not mean assuming that everyone who applies for a course will automatically be able to deal with the literacy involved – and it does not mean ignoring their literacy development needs. Rather, it means that the course designers and teachers are aware of the literacy involved in their course, and particularly in the methods and materials used; and that they examine these with a view to making the course as literacy-friendly as possible. The aim is to make the course accessible to and successful for those who have the ability to engage with the course content, concepts and skills, as well as the interest, motivation and aptitude for the relevant job.

With those prerequisites, it is possible to design and deliver courses that use a variety of methods, reduce unnecessary literacy barriers to learning and to demonstrating that learning and, at the same time, develop the essential literacy skills.

On vocational and work preparation programmes, integrating literacy includes knowing what kinds of literacy practices are involved in the relevant workplace role, and ensuring that students are helped to develop those skills.

A whole-organisation approach

For the vocational teacher, integrating literacy involves using a range of methods that take account of the different



Pictured are Ms Siobhan Carroll, PLC student in Liberties College, Dublin and Mr Michael King, Principal of Liberties College, at the IVEA-NALA Conference on Integrating Literacy

learning styles and strengths present in the group and that help each student to use their existing literacy strengths to engage with the course content. It also means using the course content as a medium for teaching and learning the necessary new literacy skills and confidence.

This does not mean that the vocational teacher has to take sole responsibility for students' literacy development. Integrating literacy works effectively as part of a whole-organisation approach, led by senior management and with clear roles for all involved. In particular, it requires a flexible working partnership between vocational teachers and adult literacy staff who work as part of the vocational programme team to integrate literacy across the curriculum.

Why take an 'integrating literacy' approach?

Research indicates that adults learn new literacy practices best as an integral part of contexts and activities that are motivating and meaningful to them - such as a vocational course they want or need to do.

In any class group, adult students will inevitably have had different experiences and uses of literacy in their lives, and therefore different strengths and needs in relation to the literacy involved in their course. No matter what the level of the vocational course, there will be a 'spiky profile' of literacy strengths and needs in the group.

One reason for integrating literacy with vocational learning is quite simply that it **works**. Research shows that by integrating literacy with the core subjects on vocational courses, 'drop-out' rates fall and achievement rates go up.

The NRDC research outlined at the conference was carried out with 79 vocational courses in England. It found that courses using an embedded or integrated approach had

- higher retention rates
- higher achievement of vocational qualifications
- higher achievement of language, literacy and numeracy qualifications.
- better preparation of students for future job roles.

Integrating literacy therefore helps to meet the goals of funders, providers, teachers and students and it helps to achieve the national policy goals of raising literacy and qualifications levels.

The presentation on the "*Literacy-friendly*" Further Education and training research also revealed that there are moral as well as **pragmatic** and **pedagogical** reasons for integrating literacy with further education programmes. It works to help adults develop their literacy at the same time as achieving important personal vocational learning goals and qualifications. In doing so it helps to redress the social and educational inequalities that have led to unmet literacy needs among adults. It also helps to remove the stigma often associated with literacy issues by making relevant literacy development a normal part of the FE course for all students.

Putting it into practice: a whole-organisation approach

Kathleen Cramer and Dr Liz McSkeane reported the main findings from the Living Literacy research into a whole-organisation approach to integrating literacy as it operates in the Newbridge Youth Training and Development Centre. They identified the practical procedures the centre uses to integrate literacy at all phases, from recruitment and induction through to progression. The research stressed the need for the approach to be driven by senior management and for timetabling and communication systems that support teamwork between literacy and vocational staff.

The NRDC research identified the main features of successful embedded or integrated programmes as follows.

- Teamwork between literacy and vocational teachers.
- Shared staff understandings, values and beliefs.
- Aspects of teaching and learning that connect language, literacy and numeracy to the vocational content.
- Policies and organisational features at institutional level.

The conference inputs also shared an emphasis on procedures and practices that put into effect a learner-centred ethos and build relationships of respect and care between all parties involved in the programme. Such positive learning relationships were cited as the foundation of successful integrated adult learning programmes.

Strategic use of resources

The main resources required to integrate literacy with vocational programmes are appropriately trained vocational and literacy staff. Prioritising this as part of the annual staff training plans would reflect the importance of literacy in vocational learning, and would contribute greatly to improved learning experiences and outcomes for students.

For vocational tutors who might be concerned that integrating literacy might mean a lot more work for little reward, the conference brought reassurance. The research and practice presentations revealed that integrating literacy in the vocational classroom often involves small changes to practice which can make a big difference to both students and teachers.

The enabling role of the adult literacy services was also highlighted at the conference, where participants heard presentations from a number of VECs on how adult literacy services can support VEC FE programmes and other vocational training organisations to integrate literacy.

Effective integration of literacy requires that vocational programmes have the active involvement of adult literacy experts who collaborate with vocational staff in planning and evaluating the programmes and in supporting students' course-related literacy development.

This model of partnership between vocational and literacy staff will operate and be resourced differently in different settings and programmes.

After the conference – what next?

The conference was a successful forum for discussing research and practice in integrating literacy and the IVEA-NALA Working Group on Integrating Literacy look forward to taking account of the learning from the discussions at this conference as it enters the next phase of its work. In doing so, it acknowledges that integrating literacy into FE programmes is not a panacea for all of the difficulties that FE providers face in providing quality learning opportunities for all seeking to move their lives forward by participating in such programmes. Nor is it a means to all applying to participate in a particular course being granted automatic admission – irrespective of the level of their core skills. Providers clearly have to make their course admission decisions on the basis of the capacity of individual applicants to complete courses successfully

and core skills, such as literacy, are inevitably relevant to determining that capacity. On the other hand, the core skills threshold established for entry to any particular course should relate realistically to the core skills that will be required on the job for which the course is setting out to prepare learners.

The IVEA-NALA Integrating Literacy Group would very much welcome the views of readers on this topic. Indeed, the views of practitioners are critical to a debate that is ongoing. Please email your views to: ero@ivea.ie and all inputs will be discussed by the working group.

IVEA and NALA wish to sincerely acknowledge appreciation to those who presented at the sessions and workshops and to all who actively contributed on the day.



Co. Carlow VEC Education and Training Centre win AONTAS' *Star Award*



(L-R): Gerry Griffin, National Co-ordinator, Department of Education & Skills; Marian Duffy, President of AONTAS & AEO with Co. Carlow VEC; Imelda Kelly, Tutor; Liz Connors, adult learner; Cynthia Deane, CEO, Co. Carlow VEC; Nigel Quirke Bolt, Centre Director; Selina O'Leary, adult learner and Seamus O'Rourke, Tutor

CO. Carlow VEC Education and Training Centre won the prestigious national STAR award in the 'projects in progress' category which was presented in Kildare Street Dublin. The STAR awards are presented by AONTAS to outstanding, learner-centred adult education projects that demonstrate high levels of collaboration amongst participant groups. The winning "Song For All" project is a partnership between the County Carlow VEC Education and Training Centre, a Senior Traveller Training Centre, and the University of Limerick.

The project aims to provide a programme of study for members of the Traveller community to further both their musical education and their personal development.

Two learners from the Centre, Selina O'Leary and Liz Connors, have received much local acclaim for their singing and this prompted the Centre to explore different possibilities into how it might be possible to develop both their musical talents and at the same time encourage their formal educational development.

This led to the Centre contacting the University of Limerick and inviting Julie Tiernan, Course Director of the Certificate in Music and Dance, to visit Carlow and hear the learners perform.

A plan was drawn up that provided the learners with educational access to both the University of Limerick and the Carlow VEC Education and Training Centre. The University offered the learners a place on the Certificate in Music and Dance after successful completion of an audition and, the Centre provided the pastoral and academic support for the learners to be able to study this course whilst based in Carlow and without them having to leave their community.

This project has provided both Selina O'Leary and Liz Connors with an opportunity to overcome the educational disadvantages that they have experienced in a way that appeals to their love of music and creative expression. The excitement that the project has generated has left a lasting impression on everyone involved.



Representing Vocational
Education Committees

FÁS-IVEA Co-operation Agreement

By Pat O'Mahony, Education Research Officer, IVEA

LAST year, IVEA and FÁS concluded a co-operation agreement with a view to facilitating FÁS and VECs working collaboratively to improve learner outcomes. Since the agreement was signed, both sides put considerable work into preparing for its implementation right across the country.

The agreement is 'managed', at a national level, by a National Steering Group (NSG), comprising four (4) representatives each from the IVEA and FÁS and a representative from both 'parent' departments – Education and Skills and what was previously known as the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

The agreement is being implemented 'locally' by eight Regional Consultative Committees (RCCs), each of which comprises the following:

- The FÁS Regional Director, FÁS managers for each FÁS operational division and such other FÁS personnel as the Regional Director may consider appropriate to the work of the RCC.
- The Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) and Adult Education Officers (AEOs) of the relevant VECs and such other VEC personnel as the CEOs may consider appropriate to the work of the RCC.

Already, RCCs have been established in the North-East, North-West and South-East and planning is well advanced to establish RCCs in the remaining six regions, prior to the school holidays commencing.

The three RCC meetings held to date have been very successful with participants expressing optimism that working together, at local level, VECs and FÁS can ensure that learners have their outcomes improved in terms of access, transfer and progression.

It is envisaged that much of the collabo-



(L-R): Anne McGovern, Regional Director, FÁS, Shaun Purcell, CEO, Co. Sligo VEC, Marie Gallagher, Manager, Community Services, FÁS

ration, at local level, will be facilitated by the work of RCC established subgroups. These sub groups will work on the development of joint FÁS-VEC projects and, as each of these projects is successfully piloted, it will be documented and made available for rollout – wherever applicable, across the country. This will allow for the emergence of best practice literally anywhere in the country and its subsequent roll out to any FÁS or VEC unit interested in using the new approach/development.

While the implementation of the co-operation agreement is very much in its infancy, already consideration is being given to the establishment of subgroups in relation to topics such as the following.

- The establishment of a database of VEC-FÁS courses – both to enable FÁS and VECs to plan provision collaboratively and to provide better guidance to learners and prospective learners
- e-Learning and associated matters
- Opportunities for sharing facilities
- Joint venture projects

- Innovative approaches to delivering programmes – especially to young people with relatively low skills
- Joint approaches to delivering guidance
- Standardising approaches to recognising prior learning.

Ultimately, the success of the co-operation agreement will depend on decisions that are taken locally – by VEC and FÁS managers and practitioners on the ground.

The recent reconfiguration of Government departments may have some implications for the composition of the National Steering Group (NSG) but, notwithstanding these changes, the agreement is as relevant now as it was a year ago. Indeed, given that FÁS and VECs now answer to the same minister, its significance may well have increased.

Overall, the agreement has immense potential and both sides are committed to seeing it implemented fully. *Tosach maith leath na hoibre.*

Health and Safety in Post-primary Schools

By Nessa Doyle, HR Officer, IVEA

Guidelines on Managing Safety and Health in Post-primary Schools:

THE Health & Safety Authority (HSA), Department of Education & Skills (Central Policy Unit), SDPI and State Claims Agency have been working in partnership to develop a management tool for post-primary schools around health and safety. The Guidelines are made up of a guidance document, an audit tool and risk assessment templates which will enable schools to manage their own safety and will provide a step-by-step approach to putting systems in place. The Guidelines will be published in late April and delivered to all post-primary schools.

The Guidelines were developed with schools and piloted in VECs, voluntary secondary and community/comprehensive schools. The HSA is fully aware that schools are not similar and each has different circumstances to manage.

Publication of the Guidelines will be backed up by web-based support through all the partners' websites, and in particular the HSA will keep a frequently asked questions section updated. The HSA also has a workplace contact unit which will provide support and advice to schools on **1890 289 389**. The HSA and State Claims Agency will be working through the education partners to promote use of, and provide workshops on, the use of the Guidelines in 2010. Check out www.hsa.ie/eng/Education/ for on-going progress and links to the education section of the Authority's website.

Health and Safety training for schools

The Education Unit of the Health and Safety Authority has developed a series of in-service courses and a suite of e-learning courses aimed at increasing awareness of safety, health and welfare matters among school managers and teaching staff. The courses are designed to meet the needs of school managers and teachers with a broad interest in safety and health as well as those teachers (including Principals) with additional functions in this area.

E-learning

The Authority has further developed a series of e-learning courses for teachers. They were developed and are hosted with www.ALISON.com; a Galway-based global on-line education company. Courses are free of charge and accessible 24/7 over the internet on www.alison.com/hsa. You can dip in and out as desired and take up where you left off. They can also be accessed through the HSA website: http://www.hsa.ie/eng/Education/Teacher_Training/E_Learning/

- 1. An Introduction to Managing Safety and Health in Schools**
Course Duration: 100 minutes of self-directed learning
- 2. Safety and Health in the Technology Classroom for Schools**
Course Duration: 140 minutes of self-directed learning
- 3. Safety and health in the Science Laboratory for Schools**
Course Duration: 140 minutes of self-directed learning
- 4. Get Safe, Work Safe – e-learning for Transition Year/Senior Cycle students**
Standalone or complements the TY NCCA-approved HSA Transition Unit
Course Duration: 90 minutes of self-directed learning

Classroom/Curriculum-related Resources for Teachers

The HSA has developed a series of resources for use by teachers in the classroom. The NCCA has just approved the HSA Transition Unit for TY and this is available to download on www.ncca.ie. Teachers and student packs are available free of charge from the HSA. Further information is also available at www.hsa.ie/eng/education

IVEA will further support the work of the HSA in schools by arranging a number of regional workshops to be delivered by HSA personnel. It is envisaged that these workshops will commence in early May.

IVEA conducts its HR Strategy Review

THE IVEA HR Forum held a one-day **HR Strategy Review** on 24 March 2010 in the administrative offices of Co. Dublin VEC. HR professionals from within the VEC sector developed and implemented a Human Resource Strategy in 2006. This implementation of this strategy has resulted in significant progress being made in standardising and professionalising Human Resource Management in the VEC sector. However, the HR function must now respond to new challenges and opportunities facing the sector. Those attending the review demonstrated a strong commitment to acting as a key support to VECs in the management of change as it presents.

Change management was identified as an area of continuing professional development (CPD) that required priority. IVEA will respond to this need by arranging comprehensive training in May, on change management and influencing people skills. This training will be tailored to the vocational education sector and will provide HR Managers with the necessary skills and

competence to effectively manage change.

The sub-groups of the HR Forum were reviewed, significant outputs and achievements were identified, some examples which include standardising HR policies and procedure by devising a staff handbook for use by individual VECs; improved communications with the Department; development of CPD programme to further professionalise the delivery of Human Resource Services in the VEC sector.

The appointment of the IVEA HR Officer was identified as a key factor in improving communication between the Department of Education and Skills and member VECs and also in ensuring that a standardised approach is taken to managing staff terms and conditions.

A full report of the review of the HR Strategy, priorities and timelines will be completed by mid-April and circulated.



Professional Development and Project Opportunities for VECs

LÉARGAS is Ireland's National Agency for the management of the European Commission's Lifelong Learning Programme which offers opportunities for all organisations involved in education and training in Ireland. Various strands of the Lifelong Learning Programme target specific areas within the education and training sector:

- School education (Comenius, eTwinning)
- Adult education (Grundtvig)
- Vocational education and training (Leonardo Da Vinci)
- Study Visits for education and vocational training specialists (Study Visits)

Comenius and e-Twinning (School Education)

Comenius In-Service Training provides funding for teachers, language teachers and other education staff, to undertake a training activity (structured course, job-shadowing, placement, conference or seminar) of up to six weeks in another European country. For instance, a French language teacher might attend a course on teaching methodologies and ICT; or a school principal could experience how others in Europe are dealing with crisis management in schools.

Through Comenius School Partnerships Irish schools can partner other European schools in projects which are pedagogically relevant and encourage intercultural exchange. These projects must involve some form of travel for the pupils and teachers involved and take place over a period of two years. To find partners for a project, teachers can attend a contact making seminar on a theme of interest. Or, they might start off with an e-Twinning project...

e-Twinning is a straightforward way to form partnerships and work on projects with other schools in Europe using Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Teachers can register and use the e-Twinning online tools to find each other, meet virtually, exchange ideas and practice and engage in online-based projects. An Irish national school, awarded a Europe-wide e-Twinning prize in 2009, took wild flowers as the starting point of their e-Twinning project. Through the course of the project the students shared their ideas and learning with their Swedish partners through photographs, blogs, audio reports and a slideshow.

For those who may be interested in working with partners in their local area as well as partners in another European country, Comenius Regio should be of interest. For example, a VEC could work with a local school and another organisation involved in school education on a themed project with a similar group in another European country.

Leonardo da Vinci - Vocational Education and Training

The Mobility strand of the Leonardo da Vinci Programme (LdV) offers funding for trainees/students and People in the Labour Market (PLM) to undertake work placements in another European country. Work placements provide access to different working practices and new technologies, as well as opportunities to enhance linguistic capabilities, key skills and cultural awareness. For example, a trainee undertaking a FETAC level 5 / Advanced



A recent study visit to Dublin

Certificate Level 6 course in Travel and Tourism could undertake a work placement related to their course of study in France.

There are also opportunities available under LdV for Vocational Education Trainer Professionals (VETPRO) who are involved in the management, delivery, or design of training, to visit European partners to exchange expertise and good practices. Projects in this category focus on collaboration between education and industry with a view to improving the content and quality of vocational training provision. For example, a tutor at FETAC level 5 / Advanced Certificate Level 6 could travel to Sweden to exchange expertise with their counterparts in another VET institution, visit this institution's work placement providers and other organisations and bring this new knowledge back to Ireland with a view to improving the content and quality of VET provision within their own organisation.

Grundtvig (Adult Education)

Grundtvig In-Service Training provides funding for those involved in the delivery of adult education in the formal and non-formal sectors, to undertake a training course (of between 5 working days and 6 weeks) in another European country. Grundtvig Visits and Exchanges enable present or future staff working in this field, or those involved in the training of such staff, to undertake a work placement, job-shadowing activity or attend a conference or seminar.

Grundtvig Learning Partnerships fund projects where learners and adult education staff from at least three participating countries work together on a project with a specific theme of common interest. For example, an Irish VEC is currently working with partners in five European countries on a project focusing on the theme of intercultural dialogue. Another VEC is working with European partners around the theme of European Community Education.

Study Visits for Education and Vocational Training Specialists

A Study Visit involves a short stay of 3 to 5 days in another European country enabling education decision-makers and those involved in education and training policy to look at different aspects of the education and training systems, share best practice and ideas and meet European colleagues.

For further information on any of the above programmes, funding available, application procedures, deadlines and eligibility requirements, visit www.leargas.ie or contact info@leargas.ie

The German Dual System of Vocational Education & Training

(IVEA Education Research Officer, Pat O'Mahony, reports on his recent study visit to Germany)

THE German Dual system of vocational education and training is unique in that it relies for its effectiveness on the collaboration of employer and employee representatives across the full range of workplace activity, in the context of an overall legislative framework (The Vocational Training Act) put in place by the State.

In a sense, it could be said that, in Germany, government establishes a clear framework for the provision of vocational education and training and then leaves it to business and the trade unions, in consultation with the education system (vocational schools), to get on with providing young people with the wherewithal essential to being good workers and good citizens.

The dual system was put in place after World War II and it is widely credited with underpinning the economic miracle that saw Germany rise, phoenix-like, from its ashes in the post war period.

Known as the Dual System because the education/training programme is split between on-the-job training, in the workplace, and theoretical education, in a vocational school, the trainees spend one to two days in the vocational school each week and the balance of the week in the workplace. Apprenticeships generally involve from one to two years training.

The dual system ensures that trainees, over the full course of all their training, have the opportunity to apply the knowledge and skills they acquire in the vocational school in real work situations. The trainees not only learn more easily 'by doing' but they also find out fairly quickly if they are suited to the career paths they have chosen.

While in Ireland a relatively minor proportion of those entering the workforce do so via the apprenticeship route, in Germany the overwhelming majority of new entrants, without tertiary education, enter via the apprenticeship gate.

To put the situation into perspective, while Ireland has some thirty different apprenticeships, Germany has in the region of 360 apprenticeships.

Indeed, there is hardly an area of work that the German apprenticeship system

does not accommodate – hospitality to health care, clerical, administration and management to construction, technology and science to art and design, recreation and sports management to technical maintenance, and so on.

The knowledge, skills and competences that trainees acquire in the course of their apprenticeships are strictly regulated and defined by national standards agreed between representatives of workers (labour unions) and representatives of employers (chambers of commerce and industry) and these standards are constantly revised to ensure that they are relevant to the ever changing needs of the workplace. This way, the newly qualified 'craftsperson' is work-ready from day one of his/her employment. On the other hand, in countries that prepare their workers principally in educational institutions, the new entrant to the workforce has a further steep learning curve to negotiate before s/he is a fully productive worker.

An interesting aspect of the dual system is that the whole system is managed by the chambers of commerce and industry rather than by the education providers.

The big difference between the Irish and German systems of vocational education and training is that, while much Irish vocational education and training involves some form of work-placement or work-experience, in Ireland the business organisation is subsidiary to the whole process whereas, in Germany, the business organisation has the primary responsibility for delivering the education and training.

In Ireland, we are inundated with 'expert' reports calling for greater connectivity between education and the world of work so as to ensure that workforce entrants have the skills and competences required in the labour market. And, indeed, it must be acknowledged that much progress has been made in improving the connectivity that the 'experts' recommend, particularly in the VEC sector where PLCs are very much a monument to such connectivity. Yet, the reality is that, in Ireland and other non-dual system countries, the business organisation merely provides the trainees with some experience of the working

environment. Consequently, it (business) does not feel any overall responsibility for the trainees' educational outcomes.

In the absence of some kind of statutory national framework requiring the involvement of business in the design, delivery and certification of vocational education and training, it is unlikely that we will see any significant progress here and that real business involvement in vocational education and training will depend on the initiative of individual educators and the relationships that they establish with industry and commerce – relationships that may well atrophy when these educators move on.

On the basis of what seemed evident in Germany, failure to involve industry and commerce and, indeed, the trade unions, in the design and delivery of vocational education and training has inevitable negative consequences for the education and training outcomes and, of course, for the wider economy and for national and individual prosperity.

In Germany, business (through the Chambers of Commerce and Industry) is an equal partner with education and the labour unions not only in the planning for and design of vocational education programmes but also in the implementation and certification of these programmes. This seems to result in the education and training programmes meeting the needs of business and the economy to a greater degree than is the case in non-dual system countries. By extension, it also results in graduates of the German dual system being more employable than are graduates of school or college based education and training programmes.

The whole ethos of the German social market economy is one of partnership between Industry and the labour unions, within a legal and institutional framework established by the State. This commitment to partnership ensures, to a very significant extent, that neither German business nor German unions see the economy in terms of a zero sum game – where one side can only gain at the expense of the other. Rather, each side's actions and policies are predicated on an acknowledgement that, working together, business and

labour can both improve their respective economic and social positions.

During the study visit, we had an opportunity to meet with union and business leaders and their commitment to working together to grow individual enterprises, individual prosperity and fulfilment and the national economy, all at the one time, was very impressive. Both sides took the view that they were jointly responsible not only for trainee outcomes but also for the social and economic future of Germany. Interestingly, Germany and Germans do not refer to 'their economy' but rather to their 'social market economy' – an economy which is neither rabidly free market nor socialist but one that combines private enterprise with a level of government regulation and infrastructure that seeks to ensure fair competition, low inflation, low levels of unemployment, good working conditions and appropriate levels of social welfare.

The social market economy philosophy, which was first implemented under Konrad Adenauer's chancellorship (1949 to 1963), has served Germany well in that it has, to a very significant extent, resulted in real collaboration between labour and business in the 'management' of Germany for over 60 years, despite the difficulties of post war reconstruction, the cold war and, more recently, the reunification of Germany. And the dual system of vocational education and training is but one manifestation of this collaboration.

Is it naive to think Ireland could benefit from adopting a similar approach? Might our vocational education system be more effective if business and unions were given more involvement and more real responsibility in designing, managing and certifying education and training? Might the spill-over from such collaboration contribute to the development of more mature and constructive industrial relations? I think the answer to these questions is very much in the affirmative.

While the German dual system seems to offer distinct advantages over our current system of vocational education and training, it is not without its limitations. In particular, most participants on the study visit felt that the German vocational education system is not as inclusive as it might be. Indeed, we felt that our own vocational education systems (Italy, Turkey, Ireland, Slovenia, Wales & Lithuania) are significantly more inclusive, from a learner viewpoint, than the German dual system.

This lack of inclusiveness stems from the fact that entry to the German dual system of vocational education is dependent on the young person obtaining employment as a trainee apprentice and, at times of high unemployment, only the very best are able to obtain traineeships.

That being said, young Germans do have other vocational education pathways open to them through the vocational schools system. However, since it is generally acknowledged that these alternative pathways are not as good as those offered through the dual system, the dual system, as it operates in Germany today, seems to discriminate in favour of the most able and least marginalised young people.

Throughout the EU, one of the key characteristics of education/training policy is a commitment to inclusion; to providing all young people with the opportunity and supports necessary to making the most of their talents and achieving to the maximum of their potential – in the workplace, in the family and in the community.

From a social policy perspective, it would, therefore, seem that the dual system, as it currently operates, leaves something to be desired. However, this weakness could easily be ameliorated if the State was to require businesses to take on a certain quota of trainees who would not, in a 'free-market' situation, obtain traineeships. The burden of including these 'disadvantaged' young people in the dual system could be borne by the State through the payment of the training allowances for this extra group of trainees. Remember, if these young people remain in the education system, it also costs the State to train them.

From a learner progression perspective, participants in the study visit felt that those completing dual system traineeships would benefit if there was a more accessible route available to them to either higher technical (Fachhochschule) or higher education (once they have completed their apprenticeship) – without having to complete the equivalent of a further year of study.

Though it is fully acknowledged that the German historical and post-war context was significantly different from that which prevails in Ireland today, all participants in the study visit felt that their countries have much to learn from the way Germany manages its vocational education/training provision. Furthermore they felt that the current international economic crisis may

well provide countries with a window of opportunity to adopt some of the best practice observed in the German Dual System – in spite of the difficult budgetary environment.

Notwithstanding the examples of best practice evident in countries such as Germany, Ireland stubbornly refuses to reform radically its education system, especially those elements of the system that cater to young people with other than narrow academic interests and aptitudes. Our whole system revolves too much around the established Leaving Certificate and direct progression to third level studies and everything else is seen as being second best.

When one sees what the dual system has delivered for Germans and Germany, one feels compelled to conclude that we have serious lessons to learn from the German experience. We need to stop thinking that Ireland is different and look at how we might adopt and adapt the best practice so evident in Germany and elsewhere to the Irish context.

Of course, there are differences between Ireland and Germany and everything that works well in Germany will not necessarily work well in Ireland. On the other hand, much of the best practice evident in the German dual system should travel well.

Undoubtedly, there is much to be admired about the way the VECs, in particular, have led a modernisation of both vocational and further education in Ireland over the years but the perception persists that much of this progress has been made more in spite of rather than as a consequence of government policy/strategy.

While it is not unreasonable to assume that the current economic crisis is a major impediment to considering new initiatives in virtually any area, the converse may well be the case. With some 75,000 people under 25 unemployed, many of them with skill sets that render them unemployable in a globalised, knowledge-based economy, we seem to have no option but to explore new ways of addressing this problem – having regard to all the contextual factors.

To do this, however, will require our key policy makers, both at a political and bureaucratic level, to acquaint themselves with the reform options currently available to Ireland. Unless and until we realise what is possible, we are unlikely to achieve it.



Developing School Leaders – Current and Future

*The Role of a Leadership Development programme by Mary Nihill,
Assistant National Co-ordinator, Leadership Development for Schools (LRS)*



Over recent years increased emphasis has been placed on school leadership as an agent for change and school improvement. There is broad agreement that school leadership is the second most important school-based variable in the learning outcomes achieved by students, second only to the quality of class teaching. The 2008 OECD study "Improving School Leadership" highlighted the importance of school leadership. The report points out that:

"School leadership has become a priority in education agendas internationally. It plays a key role in improving school outcomes by influencing the motivations and capacities of teachers as well as school climate and environment. Effective school leadership is essential to improve the efficiency and equity of schooling." (OECD, 2008)

Since its inception in 2002, the Leadership Development for Schools (LDS) programme has developed a range of strategies and programmes that responded strategically to the increasing complexity of school leadership. At post-primary level, LDS currently offers the following leadership development opportunities – not only to Principals and Deputy Principals, but also to those who would aspire to leadership positions at any level within the school.

- **Misneach:** An induction programme for newly appointed Principals
- **Tánaiste:** An induction programme for newly appointed Deputy Principals
- **Forbairt:** A development programme for established Principals, Deputy Principals and positional leaders together.
- **Cumasú:** Structured support programme for leaders in schools included in the DEIS initiative.
- **Spreagadh:** Localised professional development for Principals in conjunction with NAPD
- **Tóraíocht:** A programme for future leaders offered in conjunction with NUIM and accredited as a Post Graduate Diploma in School Leadership

For a variety of reasons, schools have become much more complex institutions than they were even a few short years ago and it is essential that those who lead them have the necessary, knowledge skills and competences to provide effective leadership – without impinging negatively on their own private lives.

Also, while until relatively recently the leadership of schools tended to be left substantially in the hands of the Principal and Deputy Principal, it is increasingly acknowledged that schools, like all other organisations need to have leaders dispersed right through the organisation. While it is obvious that Assistant Principals and Special Duties teachers occupy leadership roles, the reality is that every member of a school's staff can provide leadership and that the provision of this leadership can be particularly empowering for teachers. Sometimes, we tend to forget, as Padraig Hogan argues so cogently in the *'The New Significance of Learning – Imagination's Heartwork'* that teaching is no subordinate activity but a full blown practice in its own right – and that taking on a leadership role allows for the full blossoming of the teaching practice. Therefore, the identification of opportunities and prerequisites for exercising good school leadership is and will continue

to be a challenge for both principals and boards of management. This area of professional development is one that a leadership programme will need to explore into the future.

While we hear much about the burdens that school leaders carry, the reality is that educational leadership can be extremely rewarding. At a recent LDS colloquium on school leadership, at NUI Maynooth, several school principals said that they could not imagine a more rewarding job as it provided them with the opportunity to influence, for the better, the lives and futures of young people to an extent that would not have been possible had they not sought and obtained a principalship.

With all this in mind, LDS has put in place programmes, in line with best practice internationally, not only to assist those already in leadership roles but to prepare future school leaders through the cultivation of leadership at all levels of a school's staff. The current moratorium on the filling of posts of responsibility will require schools to re-examine their understanding of distributed leadership and to come up with more imaginative and creative ways of sharing responsibility to the benefit of both staff and students.

Neither the individual school nor the school system as a whole can wait to train school leaders until the vacancies occur. We must plan ahead and ensure that suitable leaders are available when needed – whether that is next year or in the more medium term. Indeed, the fact that a school has a relatively young management team in place does not mean that it will not have a vacancy in the short term. Schools must plan for succession and build leadership capacity. LDS can facilitate and support this capacity building.

LDS becomes part of a new generic school support service, at a time when there are unprecedented numbers of school leaders choosing to leave the profession; a development that accentuates the need to support those assuming school leadership roles for the first time in a variety of different ways. We simply cannot afford to allow our school leaders to be distracted from the critical task of leading learning by the pressures of managing other areas of school life - finance, plant, human resource management and community relations and so on. Again, the key here is to provide leaders and potential leaders with appropriate supports and training.

It is important that the leadership development element of the new school support service will work alongside the more generic areas of the service, to provide school leadership training and support on a regional basis. The new support service will aim to capture the heart of the work currently undertaken by LDS and will, hopefully, respond to continuing demand for dedicated school leadership development and supports. In doing so, however, the new model of professional development that emerges will need to recognise that the exercise of leadership is based not only on knowledge, skills, and competencies but, also, very much on personal values and personal effectiveness.

Details of all LDS programmes for second level schools are available at: <http://www.lds21.ie> Indeed, the website provides a host of links to topics that could be of interest to anyone in the teaching profession – most particularly to those in leadership roles or contemplating taking on such roles.

Sectoral Energy Procurement could yield significant savings

By Gwen Moore

Significant savings could be achieved though the aggregation of VEC buying power in relation to energy procurement. This was the key message that emerged from the recently held exploratory meeting between VEC Management bodies, the National Public Procurement Operations Unit and officials from the Transforming Public Services Programme office.

Better value for money in public procurement is among the key actions set out in *Transforming Public Services*. Achieving this demands a more streamlined and professional approach from public bodies, which are amongst the biggest purchasers of goods and services in the State. The National Public Procurement Operations Unit (NPPOU) has been established in the Office of Public Works to manage the purchase of goods and services common to all areas of the Public Service, e.g. office equipment, furniture and fittings, fuel, electricity, printing, stationery and office supplies, uniforms and transport fleets. The NPPOU's task is to deliver savings from leveraging the Public Service's buying power and administrative efficiencies arising from the elimination of tendering for similar goods and services by a wide range of public service bodies. The NPPOU is also responsible for the development of an e-tenders system including

eAuctions and will be the main driver in the development of eProcurement in the Public Service.

Energy Procurement Case Study: e3 (DIT, UCD, DCU & TCD)

In 2003 four Dublin-based colleges, Dublin Institute of Technology, Trinity College Dublin, Dublin City University and University College Dublin joined together to form an energy management bureau e3 (Energy – Environment – Economy). The Bureau analysed energy consumption, identified opportunities for savings and implemented change. e3 was formed for two main reasons – to save money and to help reduce CO2 emissions. Working together with a common focus, the colleges shared system setup costs and learnt from one another.

Energy Procurement:

The annual procurement of electricity and gas for each college was key to achieving significant cost savings. In this case, the bureau service providers negotiated on behalf of the four e3 colleges, and the option of joint purchasing agreements placed the colleges in a favourable position. Each year, the most favourable electricity contracts were sourced, and where possible purchased from green energy suppliers such as Airtricity. A joint

purchase agreement was signed with Vayu in mid-2005 which fixed gas prices for the following three years. This agreement provided budget certainty for the colleges during a period of volatility in the markets and seemingly ever-increasing gas prices. Electricity procurement alone saved the colleges over €420,000 during the three years of phase 1. A contract signed late in 2006 with Airtricity for the supply of renewable electricity projected savings of over €800,000 for the e3 colleges during 2007. It is worth noting that e3 achieved a 12% reduction in energy use in the first phase of the initiative, which yielded over €1,000,000 in savings. This makes a strong argument for combining procurement measures with demand management. In February 2009, e3 announced cumulative savings of €3,000,000 through energy reduction measures.

Sectoral Energy Procurement: Where to next?

The NPPOU is liaising closely with the Health, Local Authority and Education sectors with the view to maximising value for money, aggregation of contracts where appropriate and the establishment of sectoral areas of best practice. It is also tasked with streamlining the multiplicity of tender and contract documentation used across the Public Sector. According to NPPOU's Jim Ryan, the unit can offer support to VECs in 3 target areas: supply market analysis, demand analysis and policy assistance. There is also a need to establish a centralised framework accompanied by recognised approved suppliers. It is anticipated that competitions would be held annually. Public procurement will also need to be aligned with government targets regarding the use of sustainable energy.

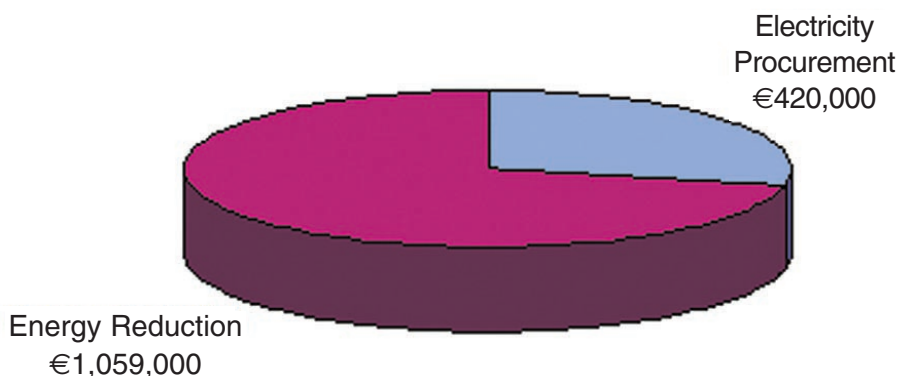
Further Information

National Public Procurement Operations Unit: www.nppou.ie
Transforming Public Services: www.onegov.ie
e3 website: www.e3.ie

SEI publication re:
e3 Initiative:
<http://www.sei.ie/Publications>

e3 initiative

Total Savings: €1,479,000
(2004-2006)



Programme of national training seminars (facilitated by the Conciliation Service, LRC) on *Managing Grievance effectively in the VEC Workplace*

By Deirdre Keogh, Development Officer, IVEA

The Consultative Forum of IVEA, the VEC NPF and vocational education sector trade unions has been involved in intensive discussions at national level, most particularly over the last year, with a view to finalising a nationally agreed procedure for staff grievances in the vocational education sector. Critical to the agreement on the content of the Grievance Procedure (nationally approved on 31 March 2010), was the commitment to train representatives from management and union alike, on the newly introduced Procedure but most importantly, to train around the skills of how to manage grievance/s at the lowest possible stage through positive interaction and skills enhancement.

To this end, a national training programme is being rolled out commencing on 13 April with the first session in Dublin and running over seven sessions in total, concluding on 18 May 2010. Sessions are facilitated by representatives from the Conciliation Service of the Labour Relations' Commission who have supported the Forum with advice, assistance, facilitation and a sterling commitment to ensure that training is meaningful to those who will attend. On behalf of the Consultative Forum membership, we wish to acknowledge

with sincere appreciation, the particular assistance of Mr Brendan Cunningham, his colleagues involved in the training and Conciliation Service Director, Mr Kevin Foley. Brendan has been tasked with heading up the training and is also confirmed as the official appeals officer under stage 4 of the newly introduced Procedure.

A Memorandum of Understanding has been developed to assist in responding to issues that have arisen during the development of the Procedure and deriving from feedback on the training.

A schedule of dates is advised on www.ivea.ie and the session numbers are restricted for the purposes of skills-based training. IVEA is also providing a secure bulletin board on a dedicated section of its website where queries common to the newly introduced Grievance Procedure or indeed to the training content, can be posted and will be addressed as substantive issues, by the Consultative Forum. IVEA wishes to thank all the members of the Forum for their personal input into what has proven to be a challenging but hopefully worthwhile Procedure for the sector.

Dates for your diary!

IVEA Congress 2010

Congress Theme:
Education – Equity & Opportunity

IVEA's 106th Annual Congress takes place in the Heritage Golf & Spa Resort, Killenard, Co. Laois, on 15th and 16th September 2010.

This Congress will be the first educational congress of the new school year and accordingly it will be a significant barometer of the reaction of education providers/school managers to the effects of the cutbacks in education resources.

The highlights of the Congress will include the Ministerial and Presidential addresses



Congress venue: The Heritage Hotel Golf and Spa Resort, Killenard, Co. Laois

and the panel discussion on the conference theme of **Education – Equity & Opportunity**.

The panel will include:

- Dr Harold Hislop, Chief Inspector, Department of Education & Science
- Dr Ciaran Sugrue, Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge.

Delegate accommodation booking forms and other Congress details have issued to all VECs. Accommodation bookings should be returned by 15 July 2010 to Conference Connections Ltd. Guest invitations will issue in the next few weeks. IVEA wishes to extend its appreciation to Ms Anne O'Keeffe CEO, the Committee and staff of Co. Laois VEC for their assistance in hosting IVEA Congress 2010.