

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, IVEA

The Future for VECs?

THE keynote speeches delivered by IVEA President Mary Bohan and Minister Batt O'Keeffe to Congress 2009 in Dromoland, Co. Clare, provided an opportunity to hear two distinct messages. The Minister is keen to aggregate or amalgamate VECs along the lines recommended in the *McCarthy Report* (from 33 to 22) or even further as has been hinted. IVEAs President, Mary Bohan argued that the county structure is an ideal efficient size for the local delivery of national education programmes. She contended that greater co-operation, more efficiencies and added functionalities would enhance the impact and effectiveness of the local county VEC whilst also delivering on key efficiencies and financial savings. She argued that the €3 million savings could be achieved without resorting to amalgamation.



Michael Moriarty, General Secretary, responding to Minister O'Keeffe at Congress 2009

VECs represented at Congress passed a resolution expressing opposition to the *McCarthy Report's* recommendations but also calling for talks between IVEA and the Department of Education and Science. VECs are not against change and their entire evolution has been about adaptability and flexibility. But what is key to the ongoing evolutionary role of VECs, is their deep-rooted connection with the local communities they serve. This is the *raison d'être* of their existence. Key to anchoring the VEC in the local community is the Committee representation by the local public representatives and the other stake-holders (parents, staff, community and business interests etc.). It is the collective input of these voices from the local community which underpins the effectiveness of local VECs and supports the work of the VEC Executive.

There is no secret about the Minister's intention. There is an agenda which sees many VECs in future, as multi-county entities far more remote from the local communities in each individual county. The county is an ideal service area for VECs as it empowers local people to manage and deliver local education programmes.

IVEA has argued that both Sections 10 and 21 of the Vocational Education (Amendment) Act, 2001, provides opportunities for VEC co-operation and sharing of services while also providing capacity for additional functionality. This should be seen as a way forward while also retaining the county structure.

What is key to any negotiations is good communication and the overwhelming view of Congress was that IVEA and the Department of Education and Science should engage in a consultative process. IVEA has requested this way forward to the Department of Education and Science. While there are varying perspectives on the future of VECs, bilateral talks can lead to a shared understanding of these perspectives. Is that not what partnership is about?

Challenging Times for Industrial Relations

The worsening economic recession and financial crisis has fundamentally challenged the industrial relations framework of the State in the context of the long-standing social partnership approach to nationally agreed policies and development plans for implementation over defined periods for the advancement of society.

Partnership thrives on a positive agenda and so it has been when national development plans were agreed by the social partners. In an era on entrenchment and enforced cutbacks on investment, the national partnership process is being seriously challenged.

After a year of cutting educational resources and supports there was unexpected but welcome news for the education sector in the form of the October 10th Renewed Programme for Government. This reversal of some of the worst cuts hitting disadvantaged pupils in particular, arose from consistent campaigning by IVEA and other education partners. Cutting supports for the weaker students was never a policy founded on educational principles. Education is an investment in future generations and an investment from which the State can deliver significant returns.

The chill winds of change driven by the cuts agenda has impacted on all public services. The constant demand for investment of scarce resources across all sectors of the economy is matched by warnings of severe cutbacks in

Government programmes, living standards and much more. Strikes are becoming a feature of the industrial relations landscape.

In the education sector, Teacher Unions have implemented directives to members in respect of parent and staff meetings outside of school hours on class size and Whole School Evaluation. The TUI is also reluctant to develop new FETAC programmes which is seriously damaging and eroding the capacity of the further education sector to respond to the future skills needs agenda.

VECs are faced with the threat of amalgamation on the basis of the *McCarthy Report* to save €3 million following the Minister's confirmation of the amalgamation agenda at IVEA Congress 2009.

Challenging times require flexibility and innovation if we are to deliver on education and training services in a time of deep recession. The IVEA/FÁS Agreement to collaborate nationally and regionally is a welcome initiative which will benefit the learner. Collaboration must surely be seen as the way forward.

The VEC National Partnership Forum has built the basis for VEC co-operation. The Forum's work has been timely and the next year or so will determine if the solid foundation is sufficiently rooted to sustain us all through very difficult times indeed.

IVEA Presidential Address – “Save our VECs and ensure a future for our youth”

SPEAKING at Congress on 17 September last, IVEA President Cllr Mary Bohan passionately defended the role of VECs, warned against further cuts to education and requested that Minister Batt O’Keeffe intervene personally to ensure that young people with low skills are not lost indefinitely ‘in the twilight zone inhabited by the unemployable’.

According to Cllr Bohan

- ‘There is virtually universal acknowledgement that education, training and skills are the turbines that power a modern economy. However, these engines need to be maintained and fuelled if Ireland is to re-establish itself as a world-class economy – rich in human capital and high quality skills’.
- Education must be protected from ‘the shell-shocks of further resource cutbacks – cutbacks with the potential to

undermine the entirety of the progress that that has been achieved since the enactment of the Education Act in 1998’.

- A ‘nation state is all about the facilitation of human progress and fulfilment. A State with a balanced budget but a people who are miserable is a beaten docket – in any age’.

Alarm at effects of cuts on provision – schools & Further Education

- IVEA is ‘alarmed at the withdrawal of essential resources from the education sector during the past year’. These cuts ‘have impaired all areas of VEC provision’.

In particular:

- The embargo on replacing VEC Adult Education Officers ‘seriously undermines provision and discriminates against those involved in non-school

education and training’

- ‘The school timetabling nightmare has required a miracle equivalent to turning water into wine ... resources cannot just be conjured up out of thin air.’
- ‘Students are losing out ... subject choice and programme options restricted ... loss of essential teaching provision for minority subjects ... students at ordinary and higher levels being combined in the one class group. The embargo on replacing post of responsibility holders is dismantling school middle management systems and reducing capacity of schools to provide appropriate support to students’.

Need for a Charter of Rights & Entitlements for Students/Schools

- The Department of Education and Science needs to ‘engage urgently with the education partners to agree



IVEA President, Cllr Mary Bohan, addressing delegates and guests at the 105th IVEA Annual Congress

a charter of rights for primary, post-primary and further education – a charter that will comprehend a set of minimum entitlements for schools and students; a charter that might be expected to restore significantly the morale of many in the education sector who have become disillusioned with what appears to be a rolling back of hard won gains for learners’.

- ‘If we could agree a set of minimum standards in relation to:
 - Class size and support for students with special needs
 - Student welfare, Counselling and mental health supports
 - Each student’s entitlement to a curriculum that meets his/her particular needs within reason
 - The ICT supports necessary to support teaching and learning
 - The knowledge, skills and competences our teachers need to maximise learner outcomes
 - The administrative supports essential to the effective operation of schools, etc.

...we would all have something to work towards collaboratively’.

- The proposal for a learners’ charter is ‘not a request for a blank cheque but a request that those with responsibility

for controlling the State’s purse strings should have regard for the practicalities of managing the delivery of educational services on the ground. The current approach of blanket embargos on appointments, if persisted with, has the potential to set Irish education back a generation’.

- ‘We have to get off this merry-go-round of claim and counter claim’ and put ‘a floor under the education system to ensure that all learners in schools and in further education programmes are provided with the education and training they need to make the most of their lives ...’
- Should the Department ‘take steps to put such a charter in place, all the education partners would feel much more included than they currently feel. Currently, they are left to rail against cutbacks – knowing not where we are ultimately headed.’
- ‘In the absence of a charter of learners’ rights, agreement about the standards we aspire to and strategies for achieving those standards, we are all left to flail around – arguing about who gets what deck chair on a ship that we feel is heading for the bottom’.
- ‘Moves towards putting in place a learners’ charter could be expected to move the education debate on to a

new and constructive platform – to provide the education partners with a real opportunity to contribute on the basis of their experience, to the strategic management of the education system’.

McCarthy Report recommendations cause disillusionment

- Proposals in the *McCarthy Report* to amalgamate VECs ‘have caused great disappointment and disillusionment’. ‘VECs are deeply rooted in their communities. They are of the community and peopled by the community. Their target for the delivery of their education programmes and services are ordinary people (young and not so young) in every parish and community in Ireland’.
- ‘Now, more than ever, there is need for VEC provided education and training programmes to counter the blight of unemployment and hopelessness that has descended on so many of our citizens – in every community in Ireland’.
- VECs ‘engage with their communities face to face – through their schools and centres, their Adult Education Officers, their Adult Literacy Organisers and their Community Education Facilitators. VECs, as well as managing some one third of all

second level schools, provide some form of further education to in excess of 200,000 adults annually – much of this targeting disadvantage, those with low basic skills and those seeking a second chance. Indeed, the number of adult learners, that VECs cater to annually, exceeds the total number of graduate and undergraduate students in third level education’.

- ‘Some commentators fail to acknowledge that a very significant proportion of a VEC’s administrative staff is involved in developing and leading education programmes for early-school-leavers and those availing of second-chance education in one form or another, many of whom fall into the hard-to-access category’.
- ‘VECs are as identified with county and city boundaries as are County and City Councils and GAA teams, and this identification bestows local ownership on the services that VECs provide. Far from being remote, face-less and bureaucratic organisations, VECs are part and parcel of the day-to-day life of every county in Ireland.’
- ‘*An Bord Snip* acknowledges that the abolition of 11 VECs is, at best, only likely to realise savings of €3 million and that such savings can only be achieved over a number of years. Is it worth weakening a vital piece of local infrastructure, in the hope of achieving such a financial saving?’
- ‘VECs are very conscious of the need for efficiencies and innovation and the VEC National Partnership Forum (VECNPF) has worked in co-operation with management and unions, for a number of years to achieve significant savings and efficiencies and this process is ongoing’.
- Also, ‘VECs have developed a lead agency model of operation whereby one VEC takes responsibility for co-ordinating and supporting an education/training programme nationwide and this has significantly improved both the efficiency and effectiveness of programme delivery’.
- ‘VECs contribute massively towards the accumulation of social and human capital. Is it not time to recognise social costs and benefits as well as financial costs and benefits?’

- ‘County identity and loyalty have been deeply ingrained in the Irish psyche by the GAA for over 100 years’.

- ‘Each VEC is an effective, transparent and highly regarded local statutory education authority – an authority that identifies with its local community, and its local community with it’.

- ‘Provincial Ireland has been stripped of too many of its assets. At a time of obvious need for locally-based education services, it is important that our Government stands behind our local education authority framework and rejects the advice of those who seem to have no apparent comprehension of the heart and soul of the Irish identity.’

Minister must intervene to ensure young, low skilled unemployed have a future

- ‘IVEA is convinced that failing to provide upskilling opportunities for young people leaving school with relatively low qualifications and young people with low qualifications losing their jobs, is a recipe for serious social disintegration’.

- ‘These young people have no real experience of the world of work and are effectively unemployable. If we desert them now, they will drift indefinitely on the unemployment scrap-heap’.

- ‘Education, training and the world of work, must connect with these young people before they become lost in the twilight zone inhabited by the unemployable’.

- Failure to act during the last recession, created ‘urban wastelands, which we still seek to reclaim today from permanent unemployment, hopelessness and crime – despite a dozen years of the ‘Celtic Tiger’.

- ‘IVEA acknowledges that this is a problem that VECs and the education sector, alone, cannot solve. Government departments such as Enterprise, Trade and Employment and Social and Family Affairs also have a role to play, as do the unions and the business world’. ‘All these constituencies must be brought together (under the chairmanship of the Minister for Education and

Science) to find a creative and coherent way, having regard for our financial circumstances, of putting in place education and training programmes relevant to the needs of these young people ...’

- Could we not ‘put some kind of traineeships in place that would involve a balanced mix of work-experience and education, with those completing these ‘traineeships’ receiving FETAC qualifications at levels 4, 5 and even 6? Such programmes could be provided in the context of the current PLC provision’.

- ‘There is a need for an extra 10,000 to 15,000 PLC places, not the 1,500 extra places that have been allocated, if we are going to go any way towards addressing the needs of those young people’.

- ‘We hear much about the creation of infrastructure and physical capital but there is another side to the equation – social and human capital’.

- ‘If a housing estate remains unsold for five years, its utility is not significantly diminished. However, if a group of low-skilled young people are left to survive on the ‘dole’ for a similar period, the task of re-integrating them into mainstream society at the end of this period presents a huge challenge and the social and financial costs of meeting that challenge will be considerable. It is not simply a matter of taking people out of moth balls and dusting them down’.

- ‘IVEA’s concern is that some *McCarthy Report* recommendations may kill rather than cure ... may lobotomise education and related services – with disastrous effects’.

In concluding her remarks, Ms Bohan said VECs had ‘contributed hugely to improving educational provision over the course of a century’ and that a ‘strong VEC sector and a strong IVEA voice is vital to ensuring that Irish education is appropriately resourced and organised to ensure that Irish learners (young and not so young) are given the best possible opportunity to make the most of their talents – in the family, in the community and in the workplace’.

IVEA Congress 2009 – In Review

By Paul Mahon, IVEA

THE 105th Annual IVEA Congress took place at the Clare Inn Hotel, Dromoland from 16th to 17th September 2009. This two-day event, hosted by Co. Clare VEC, featured many interesting contributions from both delegates and presenters. There was also the usual lively debate and banter which makes IVEA Congress a unique occasion in the education calendar.

Congress was opened by Cllr Tony Mulcahy, Mayor of Clare and Mr Pat Crehan of Co. Clare VEC. This was immediately followed by IVEA's Annual General Meeting where the 2008/9 *Annual Report* was presented to delegates by the General Secretary. The Honorary Treasurers' Report was presented followed by motions to the floor of Congress.

Day two of Congress opened with further debates on motions submitted by member VECs. Next on the agenda was the keynote debate entitled *"Upskilling – The Principal Driver of Future Prosperity – Reality or Mirage?"* with a panel of speakers including: Mr Paul O'Toole, Director General, FÁS; Dr Philip O'Connell, Programme Co-ordinator of Labour Market research at the ESRI; Mr Pat O'Mahony, Education Research Officer, IVEA; Mr Seamus Hempenstall, Principal Officer, Department of Education and Science – with the panel discussion chaired by Ms Jacinta Stewart CEO, CDVEC.

An emergency motion opposing the *Bord Snip* proposal to reduce the number of VECs from 33 to 22 opened the afternoon session. This motion was contentiously debated and featured memorable contributions from a number of delegates before being passed.

Official addresses by IVEA President Ms Mary Bohan who called on the Government 'to insulate education from the shell-shocks of further resource cutbacks; to preserve the current VEC system and to provide upskilling for young people with low skills' provided strong food for thought. Mr Batt O'Keeffe T.D.,

Minister for Education and Science, then addressed Congress referencing the need for 'a restructured VEC system' as part of the overall public service transformation strategy. He added that 'it is possible to strike a good balance through a reasonable aggregation of counties to achieve a critical mass that can underpin better service delivery'. The Minister stressed however that 'individual county representation would be preserved in the composition of each new body'. In closing, the Minister stated he would consider any written submissions the IVEA and VECs might wish to make, but emphasised the need to have a 'shared services approach' and that 'a revised structure will better facilitate taking on new tasks'.

IVEA General Secretary, Michael Moriarty, recorded a vote of thanks to the Minister picking up on a number of key points raised by the Minister. The remaining conference plenary sessions were given over to further debates on motions and concluded with an election for a vacant IVEA Officer Board position for the coming year. IVEA's Officer Board for 2009/10 thus comprises the following persons:

President:	Cllr Mary Bohan, Co. Leitrim VEC
Vice-presidents:	Mr Pat Kilbane, Co. Mayo VEC Cllr Noel O'Connor, Co. Cork VEC
Honorary Secretary:	Cllr Mary Hilda Cavanagh, Co. Kilkenny VEC
Honorary Treasurer:	Mr Ted Fitzgerald, Kerry Education Service
Assistant Honorary Secretary:	Cllr Denis Foley, Co. Carlow VEC

IVEA expresses its deep appreciation to all delegates and guests who attended and contributed to Congress and in particular, to Mr George O'Callaghan CEO, Co. Clare VEC and the members of the VE Committee in Co. Clare for their support in the planning and hosting of a very successful conference.



Batt O'Keeffe T.D., Minister for Education and Science addressing IVEA Congress 2009

Section 29 High Court Ruling in favour of Co. Westmeath VEC welcomed by IVEA

The High Court judgment on July 10th last, in favour of Co. Westmeath VEC which appealed the decision of a Section 29 Committee to overturn a decision of a school Board of Management not to enrol a pupil, was welcomed by the Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA).

This decision validates the authority of the school Board of Management to act in the interests of the school and it further confirms the role conferred on VEC Boards of Management by the Education Act (1998) and the Vocational Education Amendment Act (2001). The Court, presided over by Justice Daniel O'Keeffe, found that the Department of Education and Science's appeals committee did not have the right to compel a school to take on a difficult or disruptive student expelled by another school.

Co. Westmeath VEC's Chief Executive Mr Gearóid Ó Brádaigh hailed the landmark decision which will make it "more difficult for secondary schools to offload disruptive pupils onto other schools". He said that the ruling would have "profound implications" for the future implementation of Section 29 of the Education Act, which allows parents to appeal a school's refusal to enrol a student.

The High Court ruling was welcomed because it asserts the supremacy of the school Board of Management over a Section 29 Appeals Committee established by the Department of Education and Science.

IVEA General Secretary, Michael Moriarty, commented that "a school Board of Management has recognised functions and has authority to act in the interests of the school. IVEA and its member VECs have often taken issue with the apparent excessive powers of Section 29 Committees". He stated that "IVEA has been arguing for some time that Section 29 Appeals Committees seem to view themselves as a school placement service. School enrolment policies need to be practical, inclusive, appropriate and transparent and in this context, the current appeals process is often perceived as unfairly weighted against school Boards of Management". He also complimented the conviction and determination of Co. Westmeath VEC which rightly had been underpinned by the Court's decision in its favour.

The official High Court judgement can be downloaded from: <http://www.courts.ie/Judgments.nsf/bce24a8184816f1580256ef30048ca50/236fafdc02e77b928025762d004e12bd?OpenDocument>



SUMMER FUN AT MOYNE COLLEGE AND ST TIERNAN'S COLLEGE

Pupils who were starting Moyne College, Ballina and St. Tiernan's College, Crossmolina last September had the opportunity of attending summer camps to ease them into life within the schools. The programme was funded by the North Mayo School Completion Programme (SCP) through Co. Mayo VEC. Mr John Patterson (Acting Co-ordinator) stated *"these two summer camps introduced students to life within secondary school through fun and educational activities. Students had the opportunity to get to know staff, the physical layout of the building and to make new friends"*.

Moyne College's First Year Co-ordinator and Art Teacher, Sinead McCarthy, stated *"students can very often spend the summer worrying about what their new school will be like. Through bringing students into the school over the summer for fun and educational activities, we can answer their questions, build up their self-esteem and raise their confidence levels in a relaxed and comfortable environment."*

Five students from Moyne College gave up their time to mentor the new first year students. The students in both schools participated in a range of activities including arts, crafts, baking, metal design, sports, team building and African drumming, table tennis coaching, pool and the new craze of 'speedstacks'.

For more information about the SCP Programme, contact John/Sheila at 096 21472 or 087 670 3710 (North Mayo) and Sarah Sheridan at 094 9023060 (South Mayo).



Using ICT to enrich teaching and learning in Kerry Education Service Schools

By Pat Lawlor, ICT Advisor, Kerry Education Service

INFORMATION and Communications Technology (ICT) is now an accepted element in our society and has a central role to play in all Kerry Education Service (KES) schools. KES schools have embraced technology and continue to advance the process of integrating ICT into the school curriculum. The present debate about ICT in education concentrates on the potential impact of ICT on teaching and learning and on the measures that need to be adopted to ensure that the potential of ICT to enrich students' learning experience is realised. The increased permeation of ICT in our modern society has led to the concept of a knowledge-based society – one aspect of which is the knowledge-based economy which is vital to our future prosperity. The use of ICT in KES schools over the last decade has added value to teaching and learning by enhancing the effectiveness of learning. When used effectively, ICT enriches learning and enhances teaching. It invigorates classroom activities and is a powerful motivational tool that encourages learners to progress in a more personalised and self-directed ways. The most recent development in KES schools has been the implementation of the new syllabus in Design and Communications Technology (DCG) at Leaving Certificate which has a compulsory element of computer graphics for subject assessment.

Integrating ICT Multimedia Education in the Transition Year Programme

Kerry Education Service in supporting the development of an eLearning culture, has identified the importance of integrating modern ICT and Multimedia education in their schools. With the objective that ICT will be embedded in teaching and learning

across the school curriculum, a pilot project incorporating Information and Communication Technology and Multimedia Education will be integrated into the Transition Year Programme. This Multimedia based modular project will embrace the objectives of the Transition Year (TY) Programme and in parallel, explore the use of modern multimedia technology applicable to a modern eLearning environment. The use of modern ICT multimedia will enhance the objectives of the TY programme while providing opportunities for students to develop new ICT based skills. The use of ICT multimedia will therefore play a central role and act as a cross-curricular theme in the implementation of the objectives of the TY Programme.

Integrating ICT Multimedia into the Transition Year programme will involve the effective use of a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) incorporating high end web-based multimedia technology. The initiative aims to permeate and integrate ICT across the TY programme providing classroom activities in a powerful motivational medium that encourages learners to progress in a more personalised and self-directed way. The programme incorporates the development of key ICT skills which are used by the students to record the variety of activities involved in the Transition Year Programme. The syllabus in its present form, consists of the following core and specialist modules.

Core modules

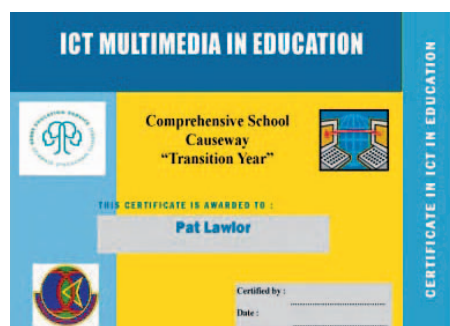
- (1) Computer hardware and infrastructure
- (2) Software applications and Internet security
- (3) Internet and email applications

- (4) File management and use of a Network environment
- (5) Digital content and Multimedia

Specialist modules

- (6) Desktop Publication skills and applications
- (7) Powerpoint Presentation skills
- (8) Wordprocessing skills
- (9) Digital Imagery and Processing
- (10) Website Design
- (11) Virtual Learning Environment.
- (12) Digital Portfolio and Presentation of class materials.

The completion of individual and group-based modules will qualify for a school-based award of the ICT Multimedia in Education Certificate.



St Ailbe's *Team Blink* are All Ireland Champions



By Nathan Dunne (Fifth year student 2008/9 St. Ailbe's School, Tipperary Town and member of 'Team Blink')



Jim Friars, ICS, presents *Team Blink* with their trophy as All Ireland Champions in the 'F1 in Schools Technology Challenge 2009'. Students l-r: Matthew Ryan, Daniel Bresnan, Olivia Breen, Nathan Dunne, Simon Ryan.

St Ailbe's School, Tipperary Town, achieved its third All-Ireland victory in the National Finals of the F1 in Schools Technology Challenge held on the 28 April 2009 at Griffith College, Dublin when *Team Blink* defeated 24 other finalists to become Overall Winners.

The extraordinary success St Ailbe's has enjoyed in this competition over the past four years is due to the enthusiasm and dedication of both the students and their teachers Mr Michael Quirke and Mr Sean Fitzpatrick. The 'F1 in Schools Competition' is run by The Irish Computer Society and sponsored by Honda Ireland. The competition is open to all secondary schools and students are required to design and manufacture CO2-powered racing cars. Student teams compete against each other in a National Championship to determine the best-engineered and fastest car in Ireland. The Competition is an exciting educational experience, enabling students to express their creativity, skills and team working ability in a fun and positive way.

Team Blink's Nathan Dunne, Olivia Breen, Simon Ryan, Matthew Ryan and Daniel Bresnan (fourth and fifth year students) came together in November 2008. The team set to work immediately preparing for the regional finals which were held on the 28 February 2009 in the University of Limerick. They manufactured their F1 car, secured sponsorship, created a logo and website

and produced a marketing plan, team stand and Portfolio. The team website was created by the students using a package called Web Easy 7 and the Portfolio was made mostly with Microsoft Publisher which the students had to learn to use. The car was designed with the use of Solidworks, a computer program which is also used in the Leaving Certificate DCG course. *Team Blink* qualified for the National Finals winning Best Use of ICT/CAD, Fastest Car and Best Engineered Car at regional level.

Team Blink then set about preparing for the National Finals. Lunchtimes, after school, weekends, mid-terms and holidays saw the fiercely dedicated team and their teachers working on the project. Sponsorship was secured from more than fifty companies with 'Tipperary Print and Design' being the main sponsor. The Team Stand was upgraded with the help of the ex-Chief Fabricator of Toyota F1 who supplied the team with a front wing, brake discs and calibres. Most importantly the F1 Car was redesigned and improved. All this dedication and hard work paid off on the 28 April 2009 when *Team Blink* went on to win **Best Engineered Car, Fastest Car, 1st place in the Senior Category and most importantly be declared Overall National Champions.**

Team Blink will represent St Ailbe's School and Ireland at the 'F1 in Schools World Championships' in 2010.

Youthreach - one of the best achievements of the last 20 years of education policy

By Lorraine O Leary, Chairperson, National Association of Youthreach Coordinators (NAYC)

'All countries that have pulled out of recession are those that have invested in education. There is a way out of this recession and Youthreach has a vital part to play in it' ...said Dr John Sweeney NRSC, speaking at the NAYC conference in Athlone, 2009.

Funded originally with European money, Youthreach was set up twenty years ago by VECs to provide skills and education to the many otherwise able young people waiting patiently during an earlier recession for the economy to pick up and for jobs to become available. In 2009, in a comparable economic situation, Youthreach is now a well-established if under-acknowledged VEC educational service, readily available to meet the needs of the increasing number of young people turning to the essential education service it offers. A recent Department of Education and Science *Value-for-Money Evaluation* gave the scheme a clean bill of health – recording that “not only did Youthreach achieve its aims but it did so with modest resources” – confirming Youthreach’s professionalism and success.

Youthreach is now a VEC managed network of over 100 centres nationwide, each catering for 25 or more 15-20 year olds, offering a variety of Leaving Certificate Applied or FETAC courses designed to help those whom the regular school system has left behind either through social difficulties, learning disabilities or a need for a system more geared to the individual than the mainstream system can provide. With innovative programmes designed to bring out the best in the students, Youthreach centres offer core subjects like Maths, Literacy and Computing through to training skills such as Woodwork, Metalwork, Art, Graphic Design and Childcare. It also involves students in developing community awareness through participation in *Gaisce Awards*, enterprise programmes, drama, sailing, outward bound activities, website design and other communications skills.



Co. Limerick VEC Youthreach Students receive Young Citizen's Award

l-r Declan White LCA 2, Lorraine O'Leary-Bustos, Co-ordinator, Aine O'Toole LCA 2, Nicky English LCA 2, Tina Cronin LCA 1, Karl Butler LCA 2, Eimear Brophy AEO, Co. Limerick VEC

A book of Youthreach experiences *'Annals of Achievement'* collated by National Co-ordinator Dr Dermot Stokes is shortly to be published. It catalogues the heart-warming testimonies of Youthreach graduates since its beginning. Many joined with little confidence or qualifications or much hope of gaining any, but left with their futures more assured and with a portfolio of qualifications and experience that has seen most move back into PLC colleges or into employment. Dr Stokes' book is essential reading for education professionals, communities, parents and prospective Youthreach students themselves, written in their own words and identifying successes not just in education, some to third level, but in personal and professional lives with many ex-students now running their own businesses.

The NAYC, the national association representing Co-ordinators of Youthreach

in all VECs, serves as a mutually supporting professional body which enriches the work of the service through sharing experiences, successes, problems and generally promoting the best that Youthreach has to offer. The NAYC is built on regional meetings attended monthly by all Co-ordinators. Regions elect a representative to meet at regular national executive meetings with the elected Chair, Vice-chair, Treasurer, Secretary, Public Relations Officer and Newsletter Editor. The Association is recognised and funded by the Department of Education and as well as representing Youthreach in discussions at national level on relevant developments and policy, it also promotes the work of the service through its newsletter and training, and meetings with key stakeholders and others at its annual conference.

For further information please contact Ms Lorraine O'Leary on youthrh@eircom.net

Co. Louth VEC's Eco-School

LOCATED in Dundalk's Sustainable Energy Zone, O'Fiaich College prides itself on being one of the best equipped post-primary and further education colleges in the North East. However, with a building that was designed and built in the late 1960's, its Principal, Padraig McGovern, was delighted with the Department of Education and Science's proposal to refurbish the College.



Coiste County Louth
Gairmoideachais Vocational Education
Chontae Lú Committee

The original building was exceptionally cold and draughty and was virtually impossible to heat. As part of the refurbishment, the building's insulation has been improved and made more energy efficient. The Department gave special attention to the upgrade and the results have been so impressive that O'Fiaich College is now a flagship project for the Department and will be used as a model for all similar future upgrades throughout the country.



Upgrading took place in two phases, with phase 1 being completed in the summer of 2006. In this phase, the roof was refurbished as were the mechanical and electrical services. Phase 2 completed in summer 2007. The exterior of the building was re-clad with insulated foam cladding, conserving heat while simultaneously giving the building a make-over. The old aluminium windows were replaced by double glazed units with state of the art e-glass. To demonstrate the improvement, the engineers calculated the air-tightness; a measure of the amount of air leakage from the building — before and after the improvements. They recorded a 70% reduction in leakage which means massive savings in heating, less draughts and more comfortable conditions for staff and students.

Other improvements included the replacement of inefficient lighting with low energy fittings controlled by occupancy and daylight sensors and the insulation of all heating pipes. At the entrance the usually open doors were replaced with automatic doors. Overall this 1960's building now has nearly three times better energy performance than building regulations require for new buildings.

The work has been such a success that the school has not only benefited from efficiency upgrades and energy savings but it has also seen a marked increase in the demand for evening/night courses. O'Fiaich College, as well as operating a large day school, is also the largest adult education centre in Co. Louth. As a result of the improvements, the demand for use of the building has increased.



Minister for Education and Science Batt O'Keeffe T.D. pictured at Congress 2009 with Gearóid Ó Brádaigh CEO, Co. Westmeath VEC and Pat O'Connor CEO, Co. Dublin VEC

Senior Traveller Training Centres – A Profile

By Mr Shay Byrne, Chairperson, STTC Directors' Association

SENIOR Traveller Training Centres (STTCs) were established by VECs in 1974 to provide basic compensatory education for Travellers and they now cater for Traveller students over 18 years of age, with no upper age limit. There is a network of thirty-three centres throughout the country. The positive affirmation model, to counter exclusion and discrimination against Travellers has been at the forefront of Government policy for Traveller Centres up to 2006.

The Travellers Educational Strategy Report, in 2006, signalled a need for a change to this policy in favour of a more inclusive model and consequently the gradual ending of a segregated delivery of educational services to Travellers. This approach was welcomed by the STTC Network and was affirmed in the *STTC Strategic Plan, 2008-2012*, in partnership with the IVEA, NATC and the Directors' Association. In 2008, building on this approach, the Department of Education and Science in the '*Value for Money Review for STTC and Youthreach*' identified a suitable timeframe of 10-15 years for STTC integration. In 2009, in the *McCarthy Report*, there is a recommendation that this integration be achieved in 2-3 years. The STTC Network now fears that this accelerated timeframe will only result in the further exclusion of Travellers from second-chance education provision, if they fail to transfer from the STTC network to other adult and further education programmes.

The aim of the Centres is to provide Travellers with the knowledge and skills required to successfully make the transition to work and adult life and to participate fully in their communities. The target group is people, over 18 years of age who have left school with either minimal or no qualifications and particular effort is made to encourage parents into the programme, given the impact this can have on their children's subsequent participation in schooling. The programme is aided by the European Social Fund. STTCs now have become integrated, inclusive and adult-oriented in their approach.

The centres are administered locally through VECs and by means of community-

based Management Committees, which are statutory sub-committees of VECs. These Boards comprise of members of the VEC, local representative organisations and members of the Traveller community. The centres have been successful in imparting the essential skills of literacy, numeracy, social & life skills, Woodwork, Metalwork, community development, personal health and Home Economics, among many others, for Travellers who have left school after primary level or who may not have gone to school at all. Many adult Travellers are now availing of second-chance education in centres; they are returning back to education in large numbers. They recognise the value that education provides in the context of breaking the cycle of educational and social disadvantage that their community has experienced for many years.

As well as providing essential education in a more holistic-centred approach, they help to break down the barrier of discrimination and engender more co-operation and respect between the Traveller community and the 'settled' community. The increased adoption of educational programmes in Centres, accredited by FETAC, has resulted in broad-based educational provision as opposed to the provision of literacy and numeracy in the context of training programmes designed to prepare students for future full-time paid employment for which centres were established in the first place.

The programme is delivered over two years and this training period can be extended if necessary to facilitate access to Leaving Certificate qualifications or equivalent. The programme integrates core skills into all aspects of Travellers' experiences. Programmes place a key emphasis on the core skills of literacy, numeracy, communications and new technology skills, while providing a range of vocational options allied with a work experience programme. The programme is designed to be flexible to respond to the needs, talents and interests identified by Travellers.

The adoption and implementation of educational programmes in all centres

certified by the FETAC, has been of tremendous benefit to the Traveller community as it allowed them the opportunity to achieve equality of outcomes with their counterparts in the settled community. The range of progression options is widened to ensure a range of choices in the education or training sectors.

A team approach is adopted in centres, with staff agreeing on the mission statement, centre policies and with delivery of the programme subject to ongoing self-appraisal and review under the Department's Quality Framework Initiative for Youthreach and STTC Programmes. There is now a quality assurance process developed for these centres based upon the principles of good practice and new developments with regard to meeting the new guidelines laid down by FETAC.

Local referral networks have a key role to play in the successful delivery of the programmes in centres; links with schools, youth organisations, Probation, Juvenile Liaison Service, Education Welfare and Health Services are important in ensuring that those in need have access to appropriate programmes. Centres have forged these links in a manner that promotes an integrated area-based response to tackling the educational disadvantage of the Travelling community.

It will be important going forward, that the education provision for Travellers is needs' focused and due recognition is given to cultural identity and diversity of the Traveller community. The inclusion of adult Travellers in Further Education needs to happen at a pace that is comfortable with the changes that are happening for Travellers and settled people. It is important that they have a supported safe space on this journey and that the integration timeframe arrives at a real integration. This will require joined-up thinking and practice among all those involved in the delivery of Further Education and area-based responses to social inclusion.

Further information is available on www.sttc.ie

Douglas Street Education Services Centre and Residential Facility officially opened



By John O'Regan, Principal Officer, City of Cork VEC

TUESDAY, 2 June, saw the official opening by the Lord Mayor of Cork, Cllr Brian Bermingham and Minister for Education and Science, Mr Batt O'Keeffe T.D., of the Education Services Centre and Residential Facility at 107/108, Douglas Street, Cork.

This Centre is a unique partnership between Cork City VEC and Cork City Council. The newly built complex in Douglas Street rehabilitates an important inner city site which has been derelict for many years. The façade of the former post office, a listed structure, has been sensitively incorporated into the new building which includes:



City of Cork CEO, Ted Owens, speaking at the opening of the Douglas Street Centre

1. **An Adult Education Services Centre** for one-to-one and small group tuition – to complement facilities at St John's Central College with Adult Basic Education Services provided by the VEC Adult Literacy Service/ Altrusa.
2. **A Crèche/Childcare Facility** for 50 children, whose parents are attending Further Education programmes at St John's, the College of Commerce and

other education and training facilities.

3. **Five (5) one-bedroom and five (5) two-bedroom apartments for adults in accommodation transition and who contract to attend an accredited education/training programme.** This Cork City Council facility is managed by the Sofia Housing Association. The aim and objective of this pilot project is to support people who are at risk of homelessness or in homeless servic-

es to establish and maintain their home and sustain an education course. Residents are provided with safe, secure accommodation with a low level of support while taking part in education.

4. **A Student Service Centre** with Student Welfare looking after disability services, crèche placements, links to accommodation provision and so on.

The Role of the Adult Education Officer

By Eimear Brophy, Public Relations Officer, Adult Education Officers' Association (AEOA)

THE role of the Adult Education Officer (AEO) is a pivotal one in the management and delivery of Adult Education Services by Vocational Education Committees.

In the current context of lifelong learning, VEC Adult Education Services comprise a myriad of programmes targeted at second chance learners and also position lifelong learning within the wider local development and social inclusion agendas. The typical Adult Education Service will employ full, part-time and contracted teaching staff. Education programmes are delivered in a variety of learning centres and include both outreach and partnership programmes. Typically Adult Education Officers manage annual budgets of several million euro.

The role of the Adult Education Officer is to manage and develop the Adult Education Service. On a county/city level, the AEO manages the delivery of programmes that are relevant, allow progression through the National

Framework of Qualifications and are based in locations appropriate to the Service. These programmes traditionally include: Youthreach, the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme, the Back to Education Initiative, Adult Basic Education, Community Education, Adult Guidance and self-financing Adult Education programmes. One of the aims of an Adult Education Service is to foster inclusive learning environments that meet the needs of learners and respect multiculturalism. The variety of aims enables the Adult Education Officer to work in a strategic role in the management of policy issues and people.

In recent years and particularly as we enter a period of economic downturn, lifelong learning is at the centre of national and EU policies. Responding to the *National Skills Strategy (2007)* is a key challenge for Adult Education Services within VECs. The delivery of upskilling programmes and the maintenance of adults and new unemployed within lifelong learning, will be the challenge going forward.

The Adult Educational Guidance Initiative

A practitioner perspective from the Adult Educational Guidance Association of Ireland (AEGAI)

By Sean Debney (Vice-chairman) and Siobhan White (PRO), AEGAI

THE Adult Educational Guidance Initiative (AEGI) began as a pilot programme established by the Department of Education and Science in 2000, following recommendations in *Learning for Life: (the) White Paper on Adult Education* (2000). A total of 41 Services have been established under the AEGI, which have been funded under the National Development Plan. The majority of Services are managed by VECs.

The AEGI originally set out to target learner participants on Vocational Training Opportunity Schemes (VTOS), Adult Literacy and Adult and Community Education Programmes including those engaged on the Back to Education Initiative. In 2006, the remit of the service was expanded to include former residents of educational institutions and their adult offspring who are clients of the Education Finance Board.

The AEGI is now in its tenth year and is considered both nationally and internationally, to be a model of best practice for the delivery of professional, client-centred and impartial adult guidance services.

Service Provision: AEGI Services are staffed by professional Guidance Counsellors and Information Officers who provide a range of key guidance supports including:

- A drop-in information service for learners and the general public
- One-to-one guidance counselling on an appointment basis with advocacy and follow up for as long as is needed
- Group sessions for learners in study skills, vocational and career information etc.
- Training in frontline guidance and counselling for tutors and providers
- Outreach services to other locations
- Referral to welfare, health and other appropriate services and supports.

Client-centred: AEGI services adopt a client-centred approach to working with

clients. This means that each client's individual circumstances are treated with respect and their starting point honoured. All aspects of a client's life are considered in developing an appropriate progression path and this leads to decisions that are appropriate and sustainable.

Each client is offered as much support as is needed to facilitate their progression and this can include advocacy to educational providers and support organisations, multiple sessions to decide the appropriate way forward and proactive follow up to ensure that a client achieves the goals they have set for themselves.

Evaluations of the AEGI have demonstrated that contact with professional, impartial and client-centred guidance services has a positive impact on clients, by promoting changes in their attitudes to learning and prompting them to consider possible progression opportunities in education and training.

Impartial, Independent and Confidential: AEGI services offer impartial and independent advice, information and guidance on educational and vocational options and offers support to clients in deciding which options are most appropriate. Personal issues and barriers to progression are discussed in this context and a confidential environment encourages clients to appraise their life situation honestly and enables the development of a learning plan that is inspiring and achievable.

Referral and Progression: Clients of the AEGI services are encouraged to consider progression in terms that are appropriate to the individual. For some, progression refers to the attainment of higher level qualifications. For others, progression involves building confidence, core skills or taking up a hobby or new interest. For many, progression is a combination of all of these.

AEGI services work closely with local education providers to identify needs and

plan provision for guidance support for learners. Since the inception of the programme, over 30,000 individuals have accessed AEGI services including significant numbers of adults from outside the designated target groups e.g. some people with learning difficulties, physical disabilities and/or mental health problems, unemployed people and foreign nationals.

Innovation and Best Practice: The AEGI has developed models of good practice that are capable of wider application and of informing future policy. Services have developed a range of models of guidance delivery to suit a variety of needs. Innovative practice has been a key feature of the Initiative and guidance practitioners have developed expertise in meeting the specific needs of learners. The services have been monitored and evaluated regularly and training has been provided for staff to develop and refine their skills.

The sharing of best practice has been key to Service development. A centralised management system has allowed information to be easily shared ensuring duplication is avoided and allowing for the best service being available to the client.

Two examples are:

- The provision of outreach services to client groups that are hard to reach, and techniques developed to provide good follow-up for these individuals.
- Identifying gaps in educational provision for adult learners to inform future planning.

Evaluations of the services carried out over the six years have found that innovative approaches to the delivery of guidance and client-specific models have been effective in integrating educational guidance into local learning provision.

Activation and the National Perspective: This recession has had a particularly devastating effect on many people and the AEGI services are right

at the frontline in helping those affected. Adult Educational Guidance has never had a more vital role to play in helping unemployed people decide the steps they need to take to create new opportunities for employment and career progression. The AEGI offers a well tested best practice model for the activation of those disenfranchised by this recession.

The increase in public awareness of educational opportunities in the current climate and the rising number of unemployed seeking education and training opportunities has resulted in a huge increase in the demand for Adult Educational Guidance services nationally. It is clear that the current level of staffing in many AEGI services is insufficient to meet the demands on the service an insufficiency

which is only compounded by the inclusion of AEGI staff within the moratorium on Public Service recruitment. It is also clear that only by the continued investment in Adult Educational Guidance, will the State be able to meet the complex needs of those needing to upskill and retrain in order to take advantage of opportunities in the emerging knowledge-based economy.

Co. Dublin VEC's Adult Refugee Programme – Art Exhibition



COISTE GAIRMOIDEACHAIS CHONTAE ÁTHA CLIATH
COUNTY DUBLIN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION COMMITTEE



Welcomed by Mr Pat O'Connor CEO and Ms Marie Griffin EO, Minister of State for Integration, John Curran T.D., recived a warm and friendly reception when he recently officially opened an Art Exhibition in Co. Dublin VEC's administrative offices, Tallaght. Displays included a range of work by students on the National Adult Refugee Programme; a Government funded integration programme administered nationally by County Dublin VEC.

The exhibition started life as a project by the Adult Refugee Programme class in Sligo, who, over a six week project, worked with a variety of Art mediums including clay, collage, printmaking and painting to create an end product through which they could communicate their hopes, dreams, ambitions and memories. At an initial exhibition mounted in Sligo, the work was used as an interactive and communicative tool with visitors who included many local community groups as well as a working group visiting from Europe.

The initial work in Sligo was added to, with work from a recently arrived resettlement group from the Congo also on display, as well as a cross-section of work from across the 36 classes currently run nationally through the Adult Refugee Programme.

The Minister commented on the high quality of the work, citing the exhibition as an example of how Art and the Arts in general, can act as powerful integration tools working side by side with communication through the English language.



Adult Literacy Provision in Ireland's New Economic Climate – Providing a foundation for social and economic recovery

By Mr Colin Cummins, Chairperson, Adult Literacy Organisers' Association (ALOA)

When taken at its broadest level, adult literacy can be seen as the basic skills an individual needs to interact successfully with the society in which they live. The National Adult Literacy Agency defines literacy as the skills of "...listening and speaking, reading, writing, numeracy and using everyday technology to communicate and handle information. It includes more than the technical skills of communication: it also has personal, social and economic dimensions" *NALA Strategic Plan 2007-2010*.

Our changed economic circumstances provides a renewed need for vigor in our efforts in adult literacy. To move forward socially or economically in the current difficult circumstances, we need to provide a solid base for all members of society to ensure the good times return and that this time everyone benefits.

The impact of Adult Literacy

For those of us involved in adult literacy provision and for policy makers alike, the 1995 *International Adult Literacy Survey* undertaken by the OECD was a seminal moment. The Report showed that a significant number of the Irish population have problems with basic tasks in literacy and numeracy (*DES ERC 1997*). The survey classed about 25% of the population in Level 1 (the lowest in a five-part scale) in respect of document, prose and quantitative literacy. This finding placed Ireland second only in the survey to Poland out of 22 countries surveyed.

Importantly, the Report also identified a link between lower levels of literacy and levels of social disadvantage and poverty. Across the country learners attending Adult Literacy Services come from the bottom 40% of income distribution, regardless of a rural or urban setting. So it stands to reason that the work carried out by VEC Adult Literacy Services is vital to bringing people out of poverty and as a means of improving their contribution to the social and economic status of the country. Significantly, as part of NALA's cost-benefit analysis of adult literacy provision undertaken in 2009¹, the agency identified that "it is possible to work out that the annual income gain per increase of one level on the NQF [National Framework of Qualifications] is €3,810 and the impact on the Exchequer in terms of reduced social welfare transfers and increased tax payments, is €1,531 per annum".

In terms of the qualifications and the workplace, the National Skills Strategy (*Tomorrows Skills, Forfas, 2007*) identifies that 539,500 people, some 30% of the workforce, have Level 3 (Junior Certificate) qualifications or less (with an estimated 10% having no qualifications). Looking at the benefit of adult literacy programmes in this context places their importance to Ireland's recovery today into sharp focus.

How do Adult Literacy Services work?

Put simply, there is no 'one-size' fits all approach to adult literacy in Ireland and the structures used across the country vary; but this is where our strengths lie. It can be argued that Adult Literacy Services, as is true of many other Adult Education programmes within VECs, provide a flexible, adaptable and responsive approach needed to meet Ireland's future education and skills requirements in a number of ways. In particular Adult Literacy Services:

- Provide one-to-one tuition to adults through locally supported volunteer networks, managed and supported by the Services themselves
- Meet the needs of adults by providing group tuition for small groups (6-8 learners on average) in reading, writing, and

numeracy, tailored to how adults learn and the specific needs of adults with basic education needs

- Provide an avenue back to education for many adults who have taken the decision to address their individual literacy challenges through the efforts of experienced and skilled staff including: Adult Literacy Organisers, Basic Education Tutors and Resource and Development staff.
- Provide specific programmes to meet the needs of our functioning economy by providing specialized programmes in workplaces. These programmes include Skills For Work (a collaboration between FAS and the VECs targeting employers at a local level to provide basic level tuition designed to upskill adults for the workplace), Return to Education (specialised programme of education for those on Community Enterprise Schemes), SkillsVEC (programmes at level 1-3 for staff of the HSE).
- Provide family learning opportunities that benefit the wider community and society by helping to build modern family structures that support our educational, social and economic development.
- Provide classes and learning opportunities in outreach settings and community venues including local community centres, schools, churches etc.

Exciting developments in ICT and web-based resourcing have seen further enhancement of the manner in which literacy tuition can be delivered. The development of fundamental digital skills for all adults across our society is vital to our recovery and to the development of a knowledge economy. We cannot assume that it is enough to focus on the high level-graduate as everyone in society must interact with technology. Adult literacy programmes play an important role in raising levels of digital skill and need to do much more in the years ahead. In recent times, the presentation of increased numbers of individuals for whom English is not a first language, also provides services with additional interesting challenges. Literacy programmes have played a significant role in the services provided our new the non-Irish national communities with a view to assisting their integration to Irish society.

Innovation and creativity are central to how literacy programmes work today in Ireland. A core principle for those of us working in the area is to meet the needs of society by first meeting the needs of the person. It is vital that we continue to make our provision relevant to adults in today's society and so our programmes are designed to deal with adults on a number of levels including addressing:

- **The career and educational aspirations of adults** – important for subsequent development of individuals and their children
- **The intergenerational effects of education:** There is strong evidence that by addressing low literacy amongst parents we can positively influence children's educational attainment helping to reduce costs to the State in providing educational supports in schools
- **Civic and cultural engagement:** People with low literacy are less likely to become involved in their communities, to vote or volunteer. While difficult to quantify, it is generally accepted that improving levels of community participation will positively impact levels of crime, anti-social behavior and levels of social decay.
- **Health:** Adults with low levels of literacy have difficulty in identifying health problems, managing their care and understanding health professionals.

¹ A Cost Benefit Analysis of Adult Literacy Training - Research Report – NALA, 2009)

Post-Primary Education Forum (PPEF) presentation to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education & Science on 22 October 2009

By Deirdre Keogh, IVEA

THE Post Primary Education Forum (PPEF) is an umbrella group consisting of parents, trade unions and management bodies involved in second-level education in Ireland. Founded in November 2007, the PPEF seeks to address common issues and establish a shared viewpoint on priorities for the future development of second level education.

Invited to present their views to a Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education and Science on 22 October last, the PPEF partners sought to stress that in this time of recession, investment in education is crucial for our economic recovery. Cuts already made are having a serious and negative impact in schools and if the education partners and Government are truly committed to the development of a knowledge economy, not only do these cuts have to be reversed but investment in education must be increased.

The presentation highlighted the following issues in particular:

The cuts already imposed:

Surveys on schools conducted by four of the education partners including IVEA, highlighted remarkable consistency in terms of the impact of the cuts in education across post-primary schools. The cuts have resulted in larger class sizes; subjects being dropped from the curriculum; the amalgamation of higher and lower classes and of different year groups; whole programmes being dropped and increased pressure on extra-curricular activities and pastoral care.

Two particularly worrying trends emerged. The first of these is the fact that many of the subjects being dropped and amalgamated are those that are regarded as the most important for developing the 'knowledge economy'. Among the subjects that schools have been forced to drop are Chemistry, Physics, Applied Maths, Economics, Accountancy, Agricultural Science, French and German. With approximately 10% of schools losing a



PPEF Representatives outside the Dáil following their presentation to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education and Science. Amongst those pictured from IVEA are Michael Moriarty, Deirdre Keogh and Standing Council member Mr Jim Moore. The delegation was chaired by Mr Paul Beddy and Mr Jim Moore, NPC.

modern language and 8% a Science subject, it is clear that these cuts are having a negative impact on the capacity of second level schools to produce the modern well-educated and flexible workforce so necessary for our economic recovery. The amalgamation of higher and lower level classes in such subjects as Mathematics, French and Business Studies is a further negative consequence of the reduction in teacher numbers.

These trends are accompanied by increases in class sizes as a result of the increase in the pupil-teacher ratio resulting in Ireland coming close to becoming the country with the largest second-level class sizes in the OECD.

The moratorium on filling middle-management posts in schools is already having a devastating effect and there is worse to come. The nature of such a moratorium means that the effect is uneven; some schools have lost up to seven Assistant Principals. Non-replacement of post-holders is placing enormous pressure on the running of schools and on the care of our students. Systems which have proven of great benefit to the provision of

a safe and supportive environment for our students, such as the Year-Head (Pastoral care) system, are now also under serious threat.

Hitting our most vulnerable students hardest:

Many of the cuts are hitting the most vulnerable and disadvantaged of our students. Increases in school transport costs and the abolition of the school book grant scheme in non-DEIS schools are among the most obvious of these. Hard pressed parents are finding themselves with anything from a few hundred to more than a thousand euro in extra expenses at the start of the school year.

One of the most worrying trends from the surveys is the number of schools which have had to drop programmes such as the Leaving Certificate Applied, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme and Transition Year.

The abolition of Leaving Certificate Applied in many schools will not only have serious consequences for those children who availed of this programme, but it will also have a negative impact on those

classes that these students now join. These students will now find it more difficult to cope in the larger 'traditional' Leaving Certificate classes.

Increased class sizes and amalgamation of higher and lower level classes also have a disproportionate effect on those students who are having difficulties. Many schools have had to abolish smaller classes designed for students who are struggling with the curriculum.

In addressing the question of... 'Why invest in education?'

The arguments surrounding the importance for Ireland's economic future of maintaining a high quality education system have been well-rehearsed. However, it is worth looking at the consequences of increasing or reducing our commitment to the education of our students. If we support our schools, our teachers, our parents and above all our children at this crucial time in their lives the consequences are positive and profound. If we fail to provide this support, the consequences are unthinkable.

The OECD has consistently reported that investment in education provides a significant economic return both to the individual and to the society at large. It also points out that there is a significant social return from investment in education, pointing out that better educated people live longer, are healthier, more socially cohesive and are more informed and effective citizens. The stark statistic that shows that over 90% of the inmates of our prisons are early school leavers speaks for itself.

Key figures such as Jim O'Hara, Intel, Martin Murphy, Hewlett Packard and Paul Rellis, Microsoft, have called on the Government for increased investment in education in general and in ICT in particular as a vital component in Ireland's economic recovery. Investment in education will always pay dividends.

We cannot punish a generation...

It cannot be emphasised enough that the teenagers in our schools today have only one chance to get the best education possible. If they are to realise their full potential it is no use coming to them in ten or fifteen years to offer them a second-level education. The damage will have been done and for many of them it will be irreparable. We understand that Ireland is facing difficult economic times. We know

that money is tight. However, apart from the fact that education will be central to our recovery, we cannot punish a generation for the sins of their predecessors. More than that, we owe them the **best possible**

chance to achieve the best they can in life. These young men and women, your children and mine, will not forgive our generation if we deny them this one chance!

QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES RAISED BY OIREACHTAS MEMBERS

In the questions that followed, PPEF members covered considerable ground in terms of the effects of the cutbacks, the need to safeguard education, the links between education and economic recovery; the need for real ICT investment in education; the effects of the cutbacks on specific subjects, programmes and extra-curricular activities etc. Members of the PPEF did acknowledge some of the rollback achieved through the Renewed Programme for Government in terms of the PTR and contribution of additional teachers etc.

In responding to specific questions raised by Oireachtas Committee members, Ms Deirdre Keogh commented that there has been demonstrable "evidence of curricular contraction arising from the cutbacks in education". She contended that "the recent range of cuts in resources and supports to schools is unprecedented in both severity and extent". She noted that "for decades, international research on education has argued that schooling is a major input to sustainable growth and employment and indeed, the European Commission has, for several years, underlined the crucial role of human capital in a knowledge-based economy". She commented on the correlation between economic growth and education – highlighting education as being "both a cause and a result of economic prosperity, both a stimulating factor for economic growth and a driving force behind the future prosperity of our country".

She stated that "education was vital in national and international economic recovery requiring increased and targeted investment rather than a curtailment, or rationalisation of investment in education and training services. It further requires new and innovative ways of how we develop our curricula to meet future labour market demands and how we prioritise and deliver our education and

training programmes across all levels and most particularly at second level when our young people are making life choices about the direction their career paths will be taking in the years following their departure from second level schooling".

In responding to questions raised by Oireachtas members, Ms Keogh stated that "there was a need to deliver a broad-based curriculum where creative skills, critical analysis capabilities and personal skills development are nurtured by the curriculum which needs to better mirror industry and business needs". She made reference to IVEA's having called on the Minister at its Congress in September 2009, to convene a meeting of Government departments including Education and Science, SFA, union representatives, representatives of the business community and education partners "to explore creative ways in which all bodies might collaborate to meet the needs of the young, low-skilled unemployed" and called on the members of the Oireachtas Committee to petition colleagues at highest Government levels to move on this initiative. She noted that "in looking to the end point of second level schooling, that it was particularly regrettable that 65% of applications for PLC places were unsuccessful this year".

Finally, she referenced the importance of "Education as an important public service and education and training responsiveness, as a key driver to economic recovery" and in acknowledging the resourcing dilemma facing Government, she commented that "our national policies must commit to safeguarding our young people and facilitate their active engagement as adult citizens, benefiting from the minimum of a well-rounded, informed 21st century second level education".

IVEA Study Visit to Norway

By Pat O'Mahony, IVEA

IN June, IVEA undertook a week long study visit to Norway to look at the totality of Norwegian vocational education – in schools, in workplaces and in third level institutions. The visit, which was financed by Leargas through the Leonardo da Vinci programme proved very successful

The dissemination of what was learned in the course of the study visit was a condition of the Leargas funding for the visit and in this context, Pat O'Mahony, IVEA, provided a detailed report on what was learned from our Norwegian host, to delegates at the IVEA Congress in September last. **Its principle findings are detailed as follows:**

Up-skilling: Learning from our European Neighbours: The Norwegian Experience

By Pat O'Mahony, Education Research Officer, IVEA

At the outset, it is necessary to make a few background points in order to set the context.

Firstly, upskilling today's workforce is essentially about enabling individuals, throughout their lives, to develop their aptitudes (intelligences) and interests to the maximum – on the understanding that we are all intelligent in different ways. Indeed, to some degree, I have a difficulty with the idea of upskilling and wonder if we should not be talking about competences (the capacity to apply skills and knowledge to solving real problems) than about upskilling or the knowledge society. What we seem to need is a competent society rather than one loaded with knowledge and skills but missing the vital ingredient of being able to apply these.

In a historical sense, Irish second level education grew out of a Church-run school system that had as its focus the education of young people for the Church, the professions and the civil service – a system that saw intelligence in linguistic and mathematical terms and those who lacked these talents were considered unintelligent.

This historical influence still casts a shadow today. Indeed, the DES rules governing the operation of post primary schools are very much influenced by the perspective. For example, recognised students at second level are required to study certain subjects; assessment is very much based on terminal examinations and so on. None of this is surprising. After all, most senior teachers, inspectors, DES officials, lecturers in teacher training programmes and even union officials are products of single-sex, old style secondary schools.

My first five years as a teacher were spent in vocational schools where the primary emphasis was on the Group Certificate – on providing young people (mainly young males) with practical skills for living and work, where relationships were relaxed, where Johnny was as good as his master, where practical skills (multiple intelligences) were highly valued – where the Leaving Certificate had yet to take hold.

Looking back, one can't help but wonder if making all schools the same was necessarily wise. Indeed, one wonders if the root cause of much student underachievement (low skills) and



IVEA Study Group pictured outside the Education Department building in beautiful Molde, in Western Norway. Pictured amongst the delegation are: IVEA General Secretary, Michael Moriarty; Marian Carr, Further Education Section, Department of Education and Science (DES); Larry Kavanagh former CEO, Co. Carlow VEC; Des Murtagh AEO, Co. Kildare VEC; Patricia O'Brien, Principal, Prosperous Post Primary School, Co. Kildare; Geraldine Canning AEO, Co Cork VEC; Anne O'Keeffe CEO, Co Laois VEC; Gerard Morgan Acting CEO, City of Waterford VEC; Stephen McCarthy EO, City of Dublin VEC; Martin Phillips EO, Co Wicklow VEC; Mary Ann Kane EO, Co Donegal VEC; Martin Gormley AEO, Co Donegal VEC; Colin Cummins ALO, City of Limerick VEC; Frances Stephenson ALO, Co Longford VEC and IVEA Education Research Officer, Pat O'Mahony.

disaffection with schooling is not due to the extent to which education policy, at second level, is underpinned by a view that, in post primary education, 'one size can fit all learners' – that the most desirable outcome for students leaving the school system is further full-time study in a third level institution and that anything else is very much second best.

In Ireland, we seem to be hypnotised by the notion that real learning only takes place in educational institutions. Significantly, in Norway, there is a strong recognition that people learn at work and that work is very educational. Norwegian research shows that adults in the workplace are more literate than school students even if they are not more educated than them.

So, when we headed to Norway on June 5th, I carried these experiences and assumptions with me. Our Norwegian experience simply provided me with a smorgasbord of exemplars for reforming an Irish education system that has, for far too long, been in need of serious reconstruction.

What stood out in Norway?

The most striking feature of Norway's school system is the preparedness to reform it radically – wherever reform is considered necessary to ensuring its relevance to the needs of individual learners and society generally.

Indeed, radical reforms in both 1994 and 2006 hugely improved the attractiveness of vocational education in Norway and now 54% of students take the vocational route in upper secondary. By contrast, Ireland has tended to tinker with the existing system and so we have ended up with an amalgam of initiatives and categorical programmes resulting in considerable confusion. While there are clearly marked progression routes up through the Norwegian

education system, the routes through the Irish system are more akin to snakes and ladders.

The Norwegian system is transparent, integrated, logical, easy to understand, centrally informed but locally managed so responsive to the particular needs of local communities.

Maybe Ireland should go back to the blank canvass rather than feeling that it has to substantially stick with the old system. We certainly need to make our further education and training system more streamlined, integrated, coherent and easy to understand for learners and those who advise them.

Norwegians entering Upper Secondary education have the right to one of three options – vocational, academic, and vocational followed by a one year programme to facilitate access to university – the latter is also available to qualified apprentices.

The Norwegian vocational stream comprises nine different programmes (*Technical skills and industrial production, Electrical and electronic subjects, Building and construction technology, Restaurant trades and nutritional subjects, Health and social subjects, Design and craft subjects, Media and communication, Service and travel, and Agriculture, fishing and forestry*) and there is a national curriculum for each programme, thus ensuring a common standard of provision.

Indeed, Norway has an integrated national curriculum from primary school through to upper secondary, thus ensuring the continuity and coherence of the whole curriculum.

Each vocational programme is aimed at preparing participants for a particular subset of apprenticeships, a matter that we will return to later.

Irrespective of the vocational programme, the teaching and the learning is practical and hands-on, with students invariably learning through both doing and reflection. Consequently, students engage with both their teachers and the subject matter as a matter of course.

Student assessment in Norway also has a practical basis with students being required to demonstrate their skills and competences rather than to regurgitate information. Oral exams are available in all subjects and continuous assessment is central to the work of schools – this is a huge advantage over the terminal exam approach which holds such sway in Ireland.

The Norwegian approach is in stark contrast to ours where many Leaving Certificate syllabi are so wide and so deep that many students experience little real engagement with either the subject matter or the teacher.

We know that young males, in particular, find it difficult to achieve educationally in what may be termed 'academic' subjects yet they thrive in practical situations. They seem to have an innate capacity for hands-on learning but fail to engage in more abstract learning contexts. We wonder about what to do about improving retention rates and skills? Is the answer not obvious?

Norwegian schools have great flexibility in meeting student needs. Those who fail to thrive in school may undertake the work-based part of their apprenticeship first and the school-based part second, when they are more mature.

Unlike Norway, Ireland does not have a vocational education stream at school level. Irish students and their influencers place a preponderant value on the established Leaving Certificate and, for many, anything else, including the LCA, is very much a less attractive option.

Maybe Ireland could learn from Norway and provide those entering senior cycle with the option of either a two year education programme providing access to third level or a two year vocational programme proceeding towards apprenticeship and work.

However, any vocational alternative would have to attract a significant proportion of the cohort, be integral to the NFQ, and allow those who opt for it to re-enter the 'academic stream' without having to go back to the beginning of the queue, as is the case with LCA graduates currently - though all three Leaving Certificates are placed at levels 4/5 on the (NFQ).

Were Ireland to put a proper vocational option in place at Senior Cycle, there is good reason to believe that up to 50% of students could opt for it.

A major difference between Norway and Ireland is Norway's comprehensive apprenticeship system. There is hardly an area of work not covered by apprenticeship – hospitality, health care, clerical and administration, agriculture, engineering, childcare, education, construction, and so on.

The Norwegian apprenticeship system bestows a status and a quality standard on work that, in Ireland, may be considered semiskilled. Such work then acquires an attractiveness that it lacks in Ireland. The Norwegian system acknowledges and celebrates the notion of multiple intelligences while, in Ireland, the primacy of linguistic and mathematical intelligence holds sway. It also ensures that skills and competences are workplace relevant.

The way the Norwegians manage apprenticeship proved particularly interesting.

The County, and there are 19 of them, manages both upper secondary education and apprenticeship – so schooling and apprenticeship are linked. Also, apprentices are mainly trained in the workplace by trained instructors/mentors – trained by the County.

Where employers can't meet all training outcomes or an enterprise is too small to employ instructors/mentors, the County makes up the deficit.

Norwegian adults can obtain trade qualifications on the basis of their work experiences. Firstly, their prior learning is assessed. Then they have free access to programmes to make up skill deficits. Finally, they are assessed before obtaining their qualifications.

The apprenticeship system is highly regarded by both the public and the private sector in Norway and both actively recruit apprentices in the vocational schools.

Generally, employers and unions are positively involved in Norwegian education. There is no 'them and us' attitude. The relationship between schools and the workplace is complementary and symbiotic.

Industry-Provider forums are a feature of Norwegian upper secondary vocational education and these ensure connectivity between the content of vocational education programmes and the skills needs of local companies – in the context of nationally determined curricula.

Might FAS, IVEA and the two parent departments explore how the Irish school and apprenticeship systems could be pulled more closely together? Vocational education and apprenticeship are complementary. Furthermore, the apprenticeship system would seem to have the capacity to inform beneficially the school system and vice versa.

In a sense, Norwegian apprenticeships do what the PLC programme does in Ireland other than that the apprenticeship system covers a much wider range of career preparations.

Is there a case to be made for Ireland adopting the Norwegian apprenticeship model? At the very least, it would seem that Ireland needs to look seriously at best practice in skills development in Northern Europe - particularly in Norway.

Would adopting the Norwegian system have implications for the PLC sector? Certainly, but not, it would seem, in any overall negative sense. If Irish apprenticeships were extended to cover the range of apprenticeships available in Norway, it might be possible for VECs to cater to a multiple of the number of PLC students they currently cater to – with each apprentice spending some two days in school each week and three days in the workplace.

It seems patently obvious that Ireland needs to put in place a more structured, transparent and genuinely quality-assured approach to skills (or is it more appropriate to use the term competency) development – an approach that links seamlessly, at either end, to the whole of our education system.

Furthermore, it would seem that a dedicated vocational education stream at senior cycle level and a much more extensive apprenticeship system could well have a role to play in reforming Irish education and training, at a macro level, in the interests of both individual students and the wider society.

What other examples of best practice were observed in Norway. Quite frankly, best practice abounded around every corner with the following being most relevant to the whole area of skills development.

- Education provision in Norway is rights based. Over 25s have a legal entitlement to avail of any unused portion of their 13 year entitlement to free education and training. Adults with low basic skills are entitled to a skills' assessment and to have all their prior learning recognised for access, transfer and progression.
- There is an Ombudsman for upper secondary education and apprentices – this links with the rights based nature of Norwegian education.
- Interestingly, the school motto for our host school, Romsdal Upper Secondary vocational School is: *'Together we are shaping the future'*, which very much sets out the school mission. So much for the Latin mottos that one tends to find in Ireland – mottos that very few understand.
- Technical support staff are available to support the work of teachers in the upper secondary vocational school system – 5 such personnel were available in the upper Secondary School that we visited.

- Norway has two education ministers – one for primary and secondary education and one for third level. This means that primary and secondary education are not dictated to by the third level system.
- Norwegian schools identify very much with their local community – this is particularly important when it comes to vocational education where schools set out very deliberately to meet the needs of their local communities.
- The importance of generic skills is very much acknowledged – with these skills being integrated into every syllabus and teachers of all subjects being responsible for teaching these core skills.
- There is a huge emphasis on enhancing teachers' competence at all levels of the Norwegian system.
- Teachers in vocational education in Upper Secondary schools have the option of upskilling by working in business environments for a period and those working in business do some teaching in the upper secondary – making education more work-place relevant.
- Norway has a clear process for Recognising Prior learning.
- There is a clear route for adults to gain trade qualifications through the apprenticeship system – 25% of apprentices are adult.
- Practical examinations are monitored by teachers from neighbouring schools and this seems to work very well.
- Free 1 year courses available from University Colleges (institutions that are very like our institutes of technology) provide a direct route to university for those with craft/trade qualifications.
- University colleges offer two year p/t teacher training courses to vocational teachers who lack a pedagogical qualification. Such teachers have a number of years within which they must acquire a teaching qualification in order to retain their teaching posts.
- Norway has many, relatively small university colleges at local level responding to the local needs` of industry, etc. The University College in Molde was very impressive; its library system is linked into the local school library system – another example of integration.
- The Norwegian system operates to ensure that the duplication of courses is minimised. While programmes and courses are not the property of particular institutions, nevertheless the system works to ensure that a course with a relatively limited drawing power is only offered by one school in a particular county/community.
- There is a big emphasis on decentralised education even up to university level – to local communities.
- There is good use of blended learning in teacher education. Consequently, Norwegian teachers are more attuned to what blended learning approaches can offer their students.
- There is an emphasis on social integration in kindergarten rather than on individuals just playing with toys. This seems to improve the communications and cooperation skills of young people from an early age, something that is deemed to be critical to all citizens – in the family, in the community and in the workplace.

Overall, the whole study visit experience proved to be a wonderful success and hopefully, it will result in ongoing conversations between the vocational education sectors in Norway and Ireland for many years to come.

Launch of new IVEA website – www.ivea.ie

By Paul Mahon, IVEA



IVEA's website has undergone a facelift thanks to the efforts of Paul Mahon, Deirdre Keogh and others. We have made an effort to significantly improve the IVEA website's content and therefore its value as an important resource for the entire VEC sector. More dynamic content such as drop-down menus and a news banner have also been added to improve usability and provide up-to-date information on key issues through fora established under various menus on the website.

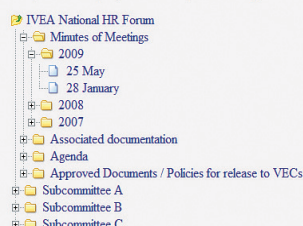
IVEA Human Resource Management (HRM) Documentation

This section of the site has been developed for use by VEC management and particularly as a resource to H through various task groups/working groups established by IVEA or made available by the VEC NPF or by memt. Persons utilising any of the documentation/codes/policies etc. should take particular care to note the section in different stages of development, consultation, agreement etc.

Note:

In the absence of a particular policy at local VEC level, the documents/policies/procedures etc. adopted formally by VECs as a resource, pro tem.

Policies/codes etc progressed or agreed through the VEC National Partnership Forum (VEC NPF) are also present.



Amongst the new features on www.ivea.ie are:

- A secure Bulletin Board replaces the Restricted Area for CEOs and EOs
- A detailed VEC services section has been introduced
- An improved Events section with a photo slideshow has been added
- The HR/IR policies section has been revamped.
- A News section with customised sorting has been introduced
- And a Google Search facility is also provided.

Secure logins are currently being advised.

Comments or suggestions can be mailed to our webmaster: paul.mahon@ivea.ie

Superannuation Task Group – An Update

By Nessa Doyle, IVEA

IN May 2009, IVEA established a task group on superannuation to support individual VECs and to ensure a consistent approach to pension calculations. The group's convenor and chairperson is Mr Jack Lynch Education Officer, Co. Sligo VEC and its membership includes Mr Daryl Heavey, Department of Education and Science and experienced personnel dealing with pensions from VECs including Ms Breda Conroy (Co. Wexford VEC), Ms Betty Corkey (Kerry Education Service), Ms Marianne Brown (Co. Dublin VEC), Ms Mary Browne (Co. Wicklow VEC), Ms Siubhán Gillespie (Co. Donegal VEC) and Ms Tina McCarthy (City of Dublin VEC) and IVEA's Nessa Doyle who acts as Secretary to the group.

Three meetings have taken place since May 2009 with an average of five cases being reviewed at each meeting. Recommendations, calculations and minutes are forwarded to all VECs for information, shared learning and consistency in approach.

IVEA has also explored the delivery of superannuation training to VECs at three different locations. Proposed training sessions will provide VECs with the opportunity to train individuals on the basic elements of superannuation at a minimal cost to VECs. This training, likely to commence in January next, will be delivered by Mr Jack Lynch and co-ordinated by Nessa Doyle in IVEA. Details will be advised to VECs as matters progress.

In Carlow the story goes on!

This unique picture reflects the evolution of Co. Carlow VEC over the decades.

Pictured are the three retired Chief Executive Officers and the recently appointed CEO, Ms Cynthia Deane, who together reflect decades of service to education in Co. Carlow.



Pictured (left to right) are Mr Larry Kavanagh Retired CEO, Ms Cynthia Deane CEO, Mr Austin Waldron Retired CEO and Mr John O'Keeffe Retired CEO

IVEA says YES to Europe too!

By Lee Hogan-Kerrigan, IVEA

SINCE its inception, the EU has been hugely committed to the development of education and to the principle that education will play a large part in Europe's – and therefore in Ireland's – future economic success. For IVEA, expanding links with policy makers and education providers across Europe is a natural and progressive development.

Education in Europe is a large and strategically important sector. Across the European Union (EU), education employs around 14 million people, about 7% of the total workforce in Europe. Realising the need for dialogue with other education providers and employers and also with European policy makers and legislators, IVEA has recently embarked on two initiatives to raise its profile on the European stage – namely *EUpromVET* and *EFEE*.



EUpromVET

In April 2008, IVEA commenced negotiations with national bodies representing vocational education providers in other EU countries, with a view to establishing a new Europe-wide representational and lobbying body for vocational education and training (VET). The organisation *EUpromVET* was officially launched in September 2008 and a Deed of Incorporation was signed in April 2009 in Amsterdam. IVEA is one of five founder members of *EUpromVET*, the others representing the Netherlands, Finland, the UK and Spain. *EUpromVET*'s primary role will be as a policy advocacy group which will seek to influence EU draft policy, conduct dialogue with the European

Commission, advance trans-national co-operation between members and promote, *inter alia*, vocational education and training as major force to sustain economic growth. IVEA is represented on *EUpromVET* by Michael Moriarty, Pat O'Mahony and Deirdre Keogh.

Employers in
Education

THE EUROPEAN
FEDERATION OF
EDUCATION
EMPLOYERS

EFEE

IVEA is also a key member of the European Federation of Education Employers (EFEE), established to represent the interests of education employers at European level. To date, membership includes organisations from eighteen countries, representing around 70% of the EU's population, who all employ the overwhelming majority of teaching personnel in their respective countries. EFEE is now working closely with the European trade union federation for teachers, ETUCE.

EFEE has recently joined the European Centre of Employers and Enterprises providing Public Services (CEEP), which brings together enterprises and organisations from across Europe, public and private, at national, regional and local level, who are public employers or providers of services. In practical terms, membership of CEEP will give EFEE, and thus IVEA, access to early information about cross-sectoral issues, such as the current and recent discussions on the Working-Time directive, parental leave etc. As a member of EFEE, IVEA will be at the forefront of developments, influencing and receiving information on policy and pivotal matters at a European level. IVEA is represented on EFEE by Michael Moriarty and Deirdre Keogh both of whom have addressed delegations in Europe on behalf of Education Employers in the VEC sector in Europe and Ireland.

IVEA proudly hosts the EUpromVET Meeting in Dublin

A meeting, hosted by IVEA, of the *EUpromVET* Council took place in Dublin in early September. Founding member organisations from the Netherlands, Finland, Denmark and the UK sent representatives to the one-day meeting. The agenda focussed on strategies for developing relationships with national authorities and agencies, with VET providers in other European countries and with representatives of the European Union. Minister of State with responsibility for Lifelong Learning, Mr Sean Haughey T.D. addressed the gathering and spoke very positively and encouragingly in support of the *EUpromVET* initiative.

IVEA extends its sincere appreciation to Ms Lee Hogan-Kerrigan who co-ordinated the host visit in September.



Delegates at the Dublin meeting of the *EUpromVET* Council with Minister for State with responsibility for Lifelong Learning, Mr Sean Haughey T.D.

The Back to Education Initiative (BTEI)

By Claire Doherty, Chairperson, BTEIA

THE Department of Education and Science (DES) through all of their Further Education Programmes aim to enhance the employability of their participants. The Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) is one of these programmes, offering accredited courses on a part-time basis only.

The BTEI (part-time) was established by the Department in 2002. At the time, it allowed for a major expansion of second-chance education and part-time learning options in Ireland. It was designed to **complement existing full-time, further and adult education programmes**¹ and build the capacity of this sector to meet the changing needs of individuals, communities and society. Programmes under the Initiative are also offered by local community groups (45 groups are funded for 2009) and a small number of non-VEC post-primary schools through the Community Strand of BTEI.

The overall **aim of BTEI is to increase the participation of young people and adults with less than upper second level education** in a range of flexible learning opportunities. Therefore, one of the main high priorities is to target individuals and groups that experience particular and acute barriers and thus are more difficult to engage in the formal learning process, for example people with a disability, Travellers, homeless people and lone parents. BTEI has opened up education opportunities to a broad range of new learners, many of whom had been previously excluded from the education system.

BTEI offers **part-time provision of up to 400 hours per year, leading to certification through the National Qualifications Framework**², at **Levels 1-6**. The aim is to facilitate adults' access, transfer and progression to other education or employment pathways through promoting the formal recognition of participant's achievements.

A significant feature and incentive of the BTEI is that **free tuition is provided to any adult with less than upper second level education**. Those eligible for free tuition now include people with a social welfare entitlement or medical card, unwaged people and those in employment. The key priority is to remove barriers to access by adults who do not have the Leaving Certificate or its equivalent, and so increase participation by this group in Further Education without incurring tuition costs.

Data submitted to the Department demonstrate that a total of **27,104 people participated in 2008** of which 76% were women and 24% were men. 37% (10,045) of participants achieved certification while 27% (7,238) of participants progressed to employment or further education/training. In addition, a further 9,643 were reported as continuing coursers from 2008 into 2009, reflecting the part-time flexible nature of BTEI.

Investment in education and training yields social and economic dividends. It is well accepted that 'labour productivity will be the key determinant of economic growth in Ireland and increasing productivity will depend to a large extent on education and

training. A workforce that is better educated and trained, can produce higher value goods and services and is more likely to innovate' (*EFGSN Tomorrow's Skills*).

BTEI has the capacity to become one of the key players in ensuring future prosperity and growth evidenced by its following facets:

- **Part-time provision**

Offered through daytime, evenings, weekends – Junior and Leaving Certificate provision is provided over one or two years with participants attending from between two to ten classes per week. BTEI in City of Limerick VEC for example offers Leaving Certificate options over one year in the evening time to accommodate those in the workforce with less than second level education.

- **Diverse range of accredited provision at Levels 1-6**

From core skills to job-related skills all offered through recognised certification channels (i.e. Junior Certificate, Leaving Certificate and FETAC accredited courses). BTEI in Co. Clare VEC for example, offered a certified shellfish farming course in a rural East Clare location, provided an accredited IT course for farmers, while still offering Childcare awards in urban locations and providing Leaving Certificate options during the day and evening.

- **Ability to deliver in any setting/location**

BTEI can and is delivered in outreach settings – not just in VEC buildings. For example, BTEI in Donegal VEC works in outreach locations on a continual basis due to the sheer size of the county, a notable example of successful outreaching was when BTEI outreached to Tory Island offering a Level 5 Media Production Course to eight participants living on the island, who through transport accessibility barriers would otherwise not have been able to complete the course on the 'mainland'.

- **Courses offered on modular or full award basis**

The emphasis on BTEI is on accreditation that is useful for further study or work, in some cases full awards are offered, while modules that are of relevance/value to the workplace are also offered on a standalone basis. Level 5 Care of the Older Person programme is offered under BTEI. All carers working with older people must have this qualification therefore the provision of this through BTEI allows direct access to the workforce

- **Courses are tailored to individual or a particular target group's needs**

While the same subject may be offered in many locations, each time it is delivered through the BTEI, the needs of the particular group are taken into account and the tutor tailors the subject to their requirements. BTEI in City of Limerick VEC for example, have worked in partnership with FAS on a Level 4 Construction Skills Course. BTEI tutors worked alongside FAS Instructors to integrate the core skills of communications and numeracy with the technical skills of

construction e.g. pipe laying, paving, laying blocks, scaffolding, cement mixing etc.

- **Ability to respond rapidly**

Due to the part-time, flexible nature of BTEI and the extension of the eligibility criteria to offer all those with less than second level education free tuition, BTEI has the capacity to set up relevant courses in a relatively short time span and thus can respond to needs on the ground at any given time. Co. Sligo VEC's BTEI for example has developed a learning programme to respond to the recent increase in unemployment. The programme offers a full Level 4 award in General Education. The aim of devising the programme, which allows participants to specialise in one of three different areas, IT, creative or Health/Community is to allow the newly unemployed with less than second level education an entry point into education that will raise their general education standard/level.

- **Partnership working**

As BTEI is part-time and was established to complement existing provision and has a limited budget, one of its key components is working in partnership with various

agencies and/or other education providers to enhance the value of its provision. Thus BTEI works with DSFA, FAS, Local communities, other adult education programmes, local Childcare Committees etc. BTEI in Co. Cork VEC for example, worked in partnership with FAS, Local Development Groups, HSE, National Learning Network, Irish Wheelchair Association and Rapid to develop a Community Organic Horticulture Course at Level 3. The development of the course in partnership with other bodies allowed the BTEI in this area to meet one of its key objectives – to increase male participation. All participants achieved certification at Level 3 and are progressing on to further education or work. The course is now continuing for further cohorts.

In our current economic climate, continued investment in the BTEI ensures that about 27,000 learners access part-time, accredited adult education each year, allowing them to enhance both their education levels and their job readiness. BTEI is committed to upskilling its main cohort – i.e. those with less than second level education, to ensure they can contribute actively to Ireland's future economic growth.

Educational Leadership: Unlocking our capacity to respond

Submitted by Co. Tipperary N.R. VEC

IN times of difficulty when people are looking for direction from others, it is often more appropriate to look within. This was the approach taken by Co. North Tipperary VEC when it developed, in association with Tipperary Institute, the Educational Leadership and Management Programme.

North Tipperary VEC believes that the potential for leadership among staff in its schools and centres of education is enormous – this potential can be unlocked so that all staff within the organisation can validate their capacity to lead educational innovation in whatever context they practice.

Through North Tipperary VEC's professional development programme – *Ar Aghaidh Linn* – an educational leadership programme was developed with Tipperary Institute (TI) which will run from September to November 2009.

The aim of the programme is to provide for the development of new understandings related to educational leadership, values, and reflection. These three theoretical strands will be critiqued and enhanced through contributions from a range of professional educational practitioners. Many of the contributions will come from staff holding leadership positions in North Tipperary VEC.

By the end of the programme, participants will understand the impact of values in educational leadership and how reflection in and on practice is fundamental to effective leadership in education.

At the planning stage it was envisaged that the number of applications would be around twenty, however by the



Staff members Sinead Tuohy and Josephine Cahill with Martin Fitzgerald of TI and Dr Noel Colleran, programme organisers

beginning of the programme, on September 21st, there were forty-two applications.

The programme is organised in association with Tipperary Institute which will be providing certification at the end of the programme. Tipperary Institute intends that this programme will provide a number of credits for a Masters in Education programme which is now being planned by the Institute.

North Tipperary VEC hopes that improving leadership competency among its staff will enable an increasingly responsive educational organisation and will hopefully mitigate some of the enormous challenges currently facing its educational services.

Irish Public Bodies (IPB) launch *'VEC Risk – excellence in governance through best practice risk management'*

By Rosemary Ryan, Irish Public Bodies Mutual Insurances Limited

MINISTER for Education and Science Mr Batt O' Keeffe, T.D. launched the recent IPB publication of *"VEC Risk – excellence in governance through best practice risk management"* in the Merrion Hotel on 5th November 2009 to an invited audience of Chief Executives, Education Officers and representative bodies.

Mr Alan Connolly, General Manager, IPB, described VEC Risk as a *"model of best practice for managing risks that could prevent the achievement of the Education Plan"*. He said that *"in the past, the focus had been on managing the tangible risks such as financial and health and safety risks but he said that in the last decade, the focus was on the management of all business risks such as legislative, competitive and social risks that could prevent the achievement of the Education Plan"*. He said VEC Risk will *"support a VEC's demonstration of good governance through best practice risk management"*.

Mr Sean Ashe CEO and President of the Association of Chief Executive and Education Officers addressed the invited audience. He said the publication of VEC Risk was *"timely; that it would assist CEOs to make evidence based decisions on the prioritisation of scarce resources to manage the key risks that could threaten the success of the Education Plan and this was particularly important in the current economic and financial climate"*. Continuing, he congratulated those involved in the publication of VEC Risk stating *"its publication (by IPB) represented another example of the working partnership that exists between our insurer and the VECs ... where there is recognition of the everyday challenges that exist in education which require to be managed, we need to comprehend that the management of risk is effective management and the outcomes that can be achieved through the implementation of risk management in all VECs will be measurable over the coming years"*.

Minister Batt O' Keeffe in launching VEC Risk, acknowledged the long and honourable tradition of VECs in providing high quality education, particularly for the most disadvantaged in our society. He said *"the VEC system had always been responsive and innovative, and was always willing to accept the challenge of pushing out boundaries by developing new models of delivery"*.

In complementing IPB on the publication, Minister O'Keeffe said *"the VECs' insurer had a long tradition as a provider of insurance to public bodies and it was no surprise therefore that IPB and the three pilot VECs – Co Donegal; Co Meath and City of Dublin - came together in order to develop the model for managing risk"*. The Minister continued that *"risk management is not a new concept, but that the events in the recent history of our country highlighted the importance of having a formal process in place to proactively identify and manage risk so that*



Pictured at the launch of VEC Risk – excellence in governance through best practice risk management are Sean Ashe CEO, Minister for Education and Science Batt O'Keeffe T.D. and Alan Connolly, General Manager, IPB

the VEC could minimise financial losses and unnecessary disruption to services, while improving overall strategic, operational and financial management".

Minister O'Keeffe said he was *"pleased to see that the methodology employed will provide VECs with a step by step approach for identifying, assessing and managing risk which will enable each VEC to create it's own risk register...(the latter) being an important source of information for staff in the VEC, Audit Committees and the Comptroller and Audit General"*

The Minister warmly welcomed the approach that IPB has committed to delivering seminars, workshops and site visits to support the introduction and embedding of a culture of managing risk at no cost to the VECs. He said that *"he wanted to see the model rolled out not just to VECs but to all schools at primary and secondary level throughout the country because risk management is just good management"*.

In summing up, the Minister said he looked forward to hearing of progress and success over the next twelve months with the implementation of VEC Risk.

The CEOs will nominate a member of management to co-ordinate the management of risk in each VEC. IPB will commence the rollout during November/December by delivering awareness sessions and these will be followed in early 2010 with the delivery of seminars and workshops on identifying, assessing and managing risk.

If you would like to know more about **VEC Risk – excellence in governance through best practice risk management** email: riskmanagement@ipb.ie

Community Education – Facilitating Partnerships on behalf of Learners

By Martha Bolger on behalf of the Community Employment Facilitators' Association (CEFA)



*Hands On
Community
Education –
Boat Building
at Scarriff,
Co. Clare*

COMMUNITY Education Facilitators are operating across the 33 VECs since 2002, arising from a recommendation in the White Paper on Adult Education – *Learning for Life (2000)*. Community Education is a strand of Adult Education whose role it is to work with and support, community groups wishing to engage in adult learning programmes. Community Education engages and facilitates a wide range of community groups i.e. women's groups, men's groups, disability groups, people parenting alone, parents' associations etc. in attempt to define and meet their learning needs.

Subject areas offered are in accordance with the learner needs but may include for example: Art & Crafts, Computers, Personal Development, Parenting, Committee Skills, Hearing Help and Independent Living Skills. Community Education is truly a service, which is for the people, of the people and by the people. The key to the success of the service is that it is delivered, by and large, in the local communities both urban and rural. The primary role of the Community Education Facilitator is to assist in the planning, development and management of the local Community Education service.

The benefit of Community Education is that it tends to work at a number of levels with the participants, as individuals and collectively as a group. At individual level, participants gain knowledge, skills and options for progression and at a collective level, it builds the capacity of local communities to critically analyse the society in which they live and mobilise groups to take action to change it. This reinforces the White Paper commentary, aligning Community Education to a process of communal education towards empowerment, both individually and collectively.

In addressing the duet of goals, Community Education Facilitators (CEFs) work very much in partnership with the Adult Education section of their local VEC and also their colleagues in other agencies such as Family Resource Centres, Community

Development Projects, Partnership Companies, HSE, DSFA and many more.

A more recent example of the Community Education Services partnership approach is reflected in submissions made to the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform by a number of CEFs for funding under the *Equality for Women Measure* in July 2008. These projects aim to respond to the criteria set down by the Department stating that “one of the greatest needs for marginalised women who are currently outside of the labour market is the availability of formalised self development and confidence building opportunities”.

Some Community Education Services were successful in securing this funding in 2009 and designed responses to meet the needs of their county's learners. The responses include FETAC accredited programmes at Levels 3 to 5, offering full awards and component certificates to meet the individual learners' needs. Progression options can then be negotiated with other programmes.

Community Education Facilitators are able to refer individuals to the many other services within the Adult Education Sector of each VEC. They work closely with their colleagues in Adult Guidance, BTEI, VTOS and Adult Literacy.

Currently AONTAS is conducting research into the long-term benefits of Community Education for Irish learners. It aims to determine the individual, collective and societal outcomes of Community Education. CEFA are part of the advisory group of this research, which will be completed and published in 2010.

If you would like further information on Community Education and the work that Community Education Facilitators do within our VECs please check out the website of Community Education Facilitators Association www.cefa.ie or contact your local VEC. A full listing of local VEC websites is also available on www.ivea.ie

The Vocational Education Sector is losing to retirement a number of key educationalists that have contributed so much both locally and nationally to the development of vocational education in Ireland in recent decades. Those retiring include: Mr Paudie Geary, Ms Deirdre Frawley,

Mr Gearoid O'Bradaigh, Mr Pat O'Connor, Mr Larry O'Farrelly, Mr Diarmuid O'Neill and Mr Seán Ó Longáin. IVEA extends its every good wish to each of them and thanks each retiring CEO for their contribution to the vocational and education sectors and to IVEA.

Mr Paudie Geary

Paudie Geary has announced his retirement as CEO of City of Waterford VEC.

Paudie was born in Mitchellstown and comes from a large and successful family. His career began in Kilmacthomas, under the remit of Co. Waterford VEC, where he taught English and History. Paudie then trained as a Career Guidance Counsellor alongside the current Minister for Transport Noel Dempsey T.D.



When this training was completed, Paudie took a position as a Teacher/Guidance counsellor in Coláiste Chathail Naofa, before becoming principal in CTI where he stayed for a number of years.

The year 2002 was an important one for Paudie as he was called upon to become acting CEO of City of Waterford VEC replacing the retiring CEO, Kieran Lyons. Paudie was subsequently confirmed as CEO in 2003 and has been a keen supporter of IVEA and an avid promoter of Adult and Further Education initiatives, hosting the national IVEA conference on Adult Education in 2006.

Paudie, throughout his career, has demonstrated an emphasis at all times, and a particular concern and interest for improving the educational opportunities for those less advantaged in society.

Mr Diarmuid O'Neill

Mr Diarmuid O'Neill started began his career with Co. Laois VEC in Portlaoise in 1969 and remained there until 1972. He then worked in Dublin until 1980 before becoming Vice- Principal of St John's Vocational School, Portarlinton in 1980. Diarmuid served as Principal of Tullamore Vocational School where, through his leadership, Diarmuid oversaw the development of the College over a period of some thirteen years.



As CEO, Diarmuid has been central to the development of services with Co. Offaly VEC not least of these being specific interests and developments in adult education, literacy schemes and outreach activities aimed at embracing both rural and urban communities irrespective of age or socio-economic standing.

Diarmuid served as Secretary to the CEEOA for some three years and was also actively involved in IVEA on a wide range of matters serving as a key negotiator in such issues as outdoor education and student support schemes. Diarmuid pioneered induction training for newly appointed Principals and Deputy Principals and contributed immensely to the development and principles of vocational education both within Offaly VEC and in the national education arena.

Mr Gearóid Ó Brádaigh

Mr Gearóid Ó Brádaigh began his teaching career as a part-time teacher in Connolly Vocational School in North Strand in 1978. He is particularly proud of having returned to teach in the same school where he had completed his Leaving Certificate prior to taking a degree in Trinity College, Dublin. Having spent some time in Mount Street Vocational School, then Bord na Gaeilge (now Foras na Gaeilge) and Ballyfermot Senior College, Mr Ó Brádaigh moved to Co. Meath in the mid-1980s as the first Principal of the newly-established Coláiste Pobail, in the County Meath Gaeltacht of Rathcairn. He subsequently moved on to Co. Dublin VEC as Principal of St Kevin's Community College on the Fonthill Road, Clondalkin and it was from here that he was appointed in 1996, as the Chief Executive Officer of Westmeath VEC.



During his tenure in office in Co. Westmeath, Gearóid oversaw substantial growth and development in the scheme and been responsible for the opening of several new centres and the installation of the Committee's headquarters and new offices in Marlinstown, Mullingar.

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Gearóid has been a longstanding member of the IVEA/ Sectoral Unions Consultative Forum and has been very actively involved in devising, negotiating and agreeing a whole range of new HR/IR procedures, particularly those that relate to grievance and discipline and allegations of bullying and harassment and sexual harassment in VEC workplaces. He was responsible for initiating High Court proceedings against the Department of Education and Science which led to a landmark decision in favour of Westmeath VEC in the summer of 2009.

Gearóid intends to pursue his interest in the areas of Conflict Resolution and Human Resource Management. In addition to pursuing further studies, he also intends to spend plenty of time "on, in and around boats". Gearoid bids bon voyage on 30 November 2009.

Ms Deirdre Frawley

Ms Deirdre Frawley has announced her intention to retire from her post as CEO of City of Limerick VEC at the end of December. Deirdre served all of her 40 years working life in the VEC sector. Appointed initially as a post-primary teacher by Co. Laois VEC in 1969, where she served for eleven years in Portlaoise Vocational School, it was at this time that Deirdre commenced her involvement in Adult Education, training adult literacy tutors and teaching on the UCD Extra Mural Programme.



In 1980, Deirdre took up the newly created post of Adult Education Officer with City of Limerick VEC. Her 18 years in that role coincided with a significant development period in adult & further education in the VEC sector. Deirdre was responsible for developing an Adult & Community Education Service in Limerick City which became known for its innovative programmes and partnership ways of working. She piloted (among others) most of the adult & further education programmes which went on to be mainstreamed e.g. VTOS (EOS), Youthreach, Community Based Learning. During this time she was a member of the Commission on Adult Education (1982-1984) and was nominated by the Department of Education of Science to represent Ireland on the Council of Europe Project *"Adult Education & Social Change (1988 – 1993)"*. In 1993, the International Council for Adult Education gave Deirdre the *"J Roby Kidd Special Award - recognising a significant and innovative contribution to adult education"*. Deirdre served two terms on the Combat Poverty Agency Board (1989-1992 and 1993-1996) where she had an opportunity to contribute to discussions and policy formation on the role of education at different levels in addressing poverty.

In 1998, Deirdre was appointed as CEO of City of Limerick VEC – the first female CEO appointed to a VEC. In the last eleven years she has shaped that VEC into a modern effective organisation which provides excellent educational services and which is recognised as a key player in local development work in Limerick City.

She has overseen a number of CLVEC Building Projects which include a new 750 pupil School Building for St Nesson's Community College; re-roofing and refurbishment of Limerick College of Further Education; rebuilding Athenaeum Building (VEC Head Office), and extensive refurbishment of the Municipal Technical Institute, now the headquarters of the Adult Education Service. Following extensive local consultation, she successfully established Gaelcholáiste Luimnigh, now in its fourth year of operation with 230 pupils and providing a significant addition to second level education in Limerick.

Deirdre has carved out a lead role for CLVEC in designing and

shaping the educational contribution to addressing social inclusion as part of the Limerick Regeneration Programme. As a member of the Limerick City Development Board she led the Limerick City of Learning Steering Group which produced an educational strategy framework for the City entitled *A Collaborative Framework for Progress* in order to guide collaborative working between all educational sectors and other sectors with an interest and involvement in learning. The principles and priorities of this Framework have been included in the Limerick City Regeneration Master Plan.

As the work of CLVEC has expanded and become more diverse in the last decade, Deirdre has focussed on organisational development to ensure that structures and other supports were put in place to enable the delivery of integrated educational programmes and services. She continually promoted and supported ongoing learning by all staff as key to building the capability of the VEC. Deirdre brought that valuable experience to the IVEA in contributing to a major policy response on behalf of the sector to *White Paper on Adult Education – Learning for Life*.

In the last decade the number of learners on CLVEC programmes has doubled (10,680 October 2009) and as a result of its innovative work and support for partnership working CLVEC is a key player in all Limerick City learning partnerships and development partnerships. The CLVEC policy and strategy documents have made a significant contribution to the VEC Sector library.

Deirdre Frawley has contributed to the work of the IVEA and CEEOA by participating on various Working Groups, e.g. Adult & Further Education, in particular Adult Basic Education, Curriculum Development, Workplace Learning, NCVA/FETAC etc. She has also represented the VEC Sector on external bodies e.g. NCCA.

Mr Pat O'Connor

Mr Pat O'Connor has served as Chief Executive Officer of County Dublin VEC for twelve years from 1997 to 2009. Prior to his appointment as CEO of Co. Dublin VEC, Pat had worked for two years as Education Officer with the County and previously served for twenty three years in Greenhills College, fourteen years of these as Principal and Deputy Principal.



Pat has presided over significant changes in County Dublin VEC including the setting up from greenfield situations of eight new post-primary schools, the transfer of a voluntary secondary school to a Community College as well as the establishment of the country's first two new Community National Schools. He has also been responsible for a rapid

expansion of Further and Adult Education and Youth Services in County Dublin. Under Pat's guidance and initiative the administration of County Dublin VEC has been completely reorganised through the establishment of empowered and accountable management structures and through the installation of advanced ICT systems. In tandem with these developments he negotiated the relocation of the VEC's administrative head office to a modern state of the art facility at Tuansgate, The Square, Tallaght.

At a national level, Pat was involved in the negotiations which brought about the transfer of Traveller Training Centers into the VEC system. He played a leading role in negotiations on implementing the Rochford Review on VEC administrative staffing levels and also represented the IVEA as advisor on the recently agreed Redeployment Scheme for Post Primary Teachers. He has been a member of the National Executive of the Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools since 2001 and Chairman of the Vocational Support Services Unit for the last four years. In addition, Pat has been a member of the Board of Management of Newpark Comprehensive School for twelve years and is also a member of the National Trustee Forum for Community Schools.

Pat retires on 30 November, having successfully led County Dublin VEC through a period of significant growth and process of modernisation.

Mr Larry O'Farrelly

Mr Larry O'Farrelly, a Science graduate, began his career in 1968 as a teacher with Co. Offaly VEC in Birr Vocational School. From 1969 to 1984 he taught with Co. Clare VEC and in 1984 was appointed as Principal of Ennis Community College.



In 1997 Larry was appointed Chief Executive Officer of Co. Roscommon VEC and during his tenure, was responsible for the introduction of several new initiatives to the scheme including a Traveller Training Centre, a new Youthreach Centre and oversaw the introduction of the Guidance Initiative and BTEI to the VEC scheme. Larry also oversaw 2 major building projects at Boyle and Elphin centres.

Larry served as Treasurer of the CEEOA for three years and was involved over the years at national level in a number of IVEA task groups and committees including, in particular, working groups relating to Prison Education.

Mr Seán Ó Longáin

Mr Seán Ó Longáin was appointed Chief Executive Officer of Co Donegal Vocational Educational Committee in September 1976, following five years of service as a second level teacher and a further five year period as a Post-primary Inspector dealing primarily with the vocational sector.



Based on a partnership with the members and staff of the Committee, Sean lead and guided the enhancement of the services and facilities in the following areas: Second Level, Adult and Further Education, Higher Education Services, Outdoor Education and Music Education. The second level education service was enhanced by developing the new colleges including, Community College in Moville, Magh Ene College in Bundoran in succession to the Louis Order, Gairm Scoil Chu Uladh, for the Gealtacht Lár, Coláiste Ailigh, Leitir Ceanain and Gairm Scoil Mhic Diarmada, Arainn Mhór.

Under Sean's leadership, Co. Donegal VEC has developed a network of six dedicated multiplex Adult Education Centres throughout the County and has developed Adult and Community services in these dedicated centres and other locations. In addition, a splendid Outdoor Education facility and service on a 87 acres estate in Gartan Outdoor Education Centre incorporating the Colmcille Heritage Centre was also developed and more recently, a Music Education Service in partnership with other agencies within the county, based on the Music Network Report of 2004 has been introduced.

At National Level, Seán served as President of the CEEOA from 2006 to 2008 and is currently an IVEA nominee on the Council of FETAC, the National Youth Work Advisory Committee (NYWAC) and on the NCCA Course Committees of both Gaelige and History at Senior and Junior Cycle levels. He is also a representative on the Management Representative Group (MRG) acting on behalf of the JMB, ACCS an IVEA in relation to the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) and the Education for Special Education Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004.

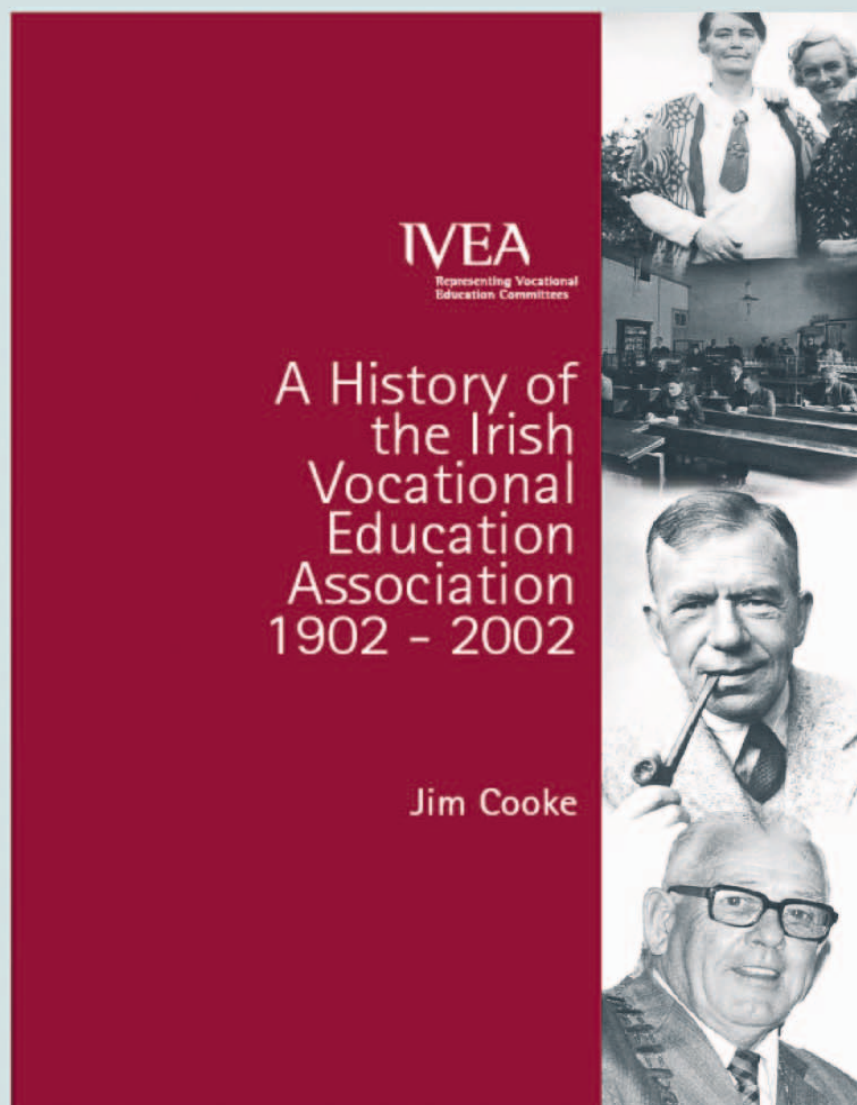
As part of a programme of Continuous Professional Development, Sean qualified as a Barrister in 1998 and became a fellow of the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators in 2000 and an accredited Mediator with the Institute of Arbitrators in 2008. Sean retires at the end of November.

**IVEA wishes all retiring CEOs, their partners and families,
every good wish for the future.**

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.



Purchase your copy from IVEA Head Office

Cost is €30 + €8 p&p.

Tel: 01 4966033 or log onto www.ivea.ie for details

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Representing Vocational
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Minister Hanafin launches IVEA History



Minister for Social and Family Affairs, Ms Mary Hanafin T.D. and Mr Jim Cooke, Author, of 'A History of the Irish Vocational Education Association 1902 -2002'

'A History of the Irish Vocational Education Association 1902 – 2002' was launched by the Minister for Social and Family Affairs, Ms Mary Hanafin T.D. at the European Commission Offices, Dublin on 27 May 2009.

IVEA President Cllr Mary Bohan highlighted the launch as being "a very significant day in the life of the Irish Vocational Education Association" and thanked the book's author, Mr Jim Cooke for his "labour of love". She also acknowledged Micheal O'Lionain, retired CEO, Dun Laoghaire VEC, and Barra O'Briain, CEO, Co. Cork VEC, for providing editorial support.

"Ireland is unique in having a national body such as the IVEA overseeing vocational education develop-

ment" said Michael Moriarty, IVEA General Secretary. He also informed those in attendance "that Ireland and four other similar national bodies in Finland, the Netherlands, the UK and Denmark have recently founded EUproVET, to promote the interests of vocational education within the EU."

Jim Cooke's traces the development of Irish technical education over a hundred years from 1902 to 2002 – from the first Mechanics' Institute in Dublin in 1824, the Vocational Schools of the 1930s and the Community Colleges of the 1980s.

A copy of this book can be obtained from IVEA Head Office by emailing support@ivea.ie at a cost of €30 + €8 p&p. A very worthwhile read!

UPCOMING EVENTS

IVEA WINTER ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF SEMINAR

Dates: Wednesday, 25 November to Friday,
27 November 2009

Venue: Jurys Cork Hotel, Western Road, Cork

IVEA SEMINARS ON SUPERANNUATION

Dates: Proposed to commence in January 2010
Details of the venue and bookings will be advised
to individual VECs

SEMINARS FOR VEC STAFF ON MANAGING GRIEVANCE EFFECTIVELY IN THE WORKPLACE

Arranged through the assistance of the VEC NPF and Consultative Forum (of IVEA and vocational education sector trade unions) these seminars will be facilitated by the Conciliation Service, Labour Relations Commission
Dates: Pilot seminar January 2010

Further rollout scheduled in nine additional sessions
from late January 2010 to April 2010

Details of the venue and bookings will be advised to
individual VECs