

# IVEA NEWS

Representing Vocational Education Committees

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

ISSUE: WINTER 2010

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VECs **dismayed**  
over aggregation  
announcement

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EDITOR: DEIRDRE KEOGH

## Cabinet decision on aggregation of VECs greeted with dismay



The announcement by Tánaiste Mary Coughlan on October 12th of the Cabinet decision to aggregate Vocational Education Committees (VECs) has been greeted by a mixture of shock and dismay throughout the vocational education sector.

The Government's intention to aggregate VECs has been well aired by the Tánaiste and her predecessor Minister Batt O'Keeffe. For the past eighteen months, IVEA has been conducting a lengthy multi-faceted campaign to convince Government that the aggregation of VECs was educationally unsound and would break the close and long established links of VECs with their local communities.

There had been an expectation that some aggregations were on the cards, particularly in the context of the recommendations in the *Report of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure Programmes (Bord Snip Report)* and in the context of the Transforming Public Service (TPS) agenda. But what was not anticipated was the severity of the proposed reduction of VECs to 16 new entities instead of the current 33.

Member VECs were asked to consider the proposals and remit their responses to IVEA. These were considered by IVEA's national executive committees, including Standing Council.

IVEA is now considering its position in regard to the proposed aggregations. VECs have registered their opposition to the proposals. Standing Council will finalise its position on November 26th and will refine its strategy to respond to the Government's proposals.

IVEA also met the Department of Education and Skills on October 29th, where a rationale for the announced aggregation of VECs was sought. IVEA argued emphatically that its commitment remained steadfastly to the county VEC administrative structure and further contended that the geographically large entities proposed – were not educationally sound. The geographic size of the five three-county entities were at variance with the *raison d'être* of VECs whose very basis of success has been their connectedness to their local communities. This link will be forever severed in new VEC entities, some of which are geographically closer to the size of the ill-fated regional education boards proposed in the 1990s than the current VECs. Of particular note also is the breaking of the direct link with the local authority administrative structures.

It is a long road that has no turning and the timescale for implementation of the proposals will be eighteen months or more. In the meantime, IVEA will continue to argue strongly on educational, social and representational grounds, for a review of these draconian proposals. The climb is steep, yet the challenge remains – this story has not finished yet!

## New IVEA President



New IVEA President,  
Cllr Noel O'Connor

IVEA is pleased to announce the appointment of Cllr Noel O'Connor to the role of President of the Association effective from 16th September 2010.

Noel has been involved in education for over 30 years. After graduating with a B.A. from University College Cork in 1974 and having obtained a Higher Diploma in Education the following year, Noel worked as a teacher in Davis College in Mallow. His career at Davis College extended well over the next twenty years where he took on responsibility for the provision of Adult and Continuing Education.

In 1974, Noel was nominated by Mallow Town Council to serve as a member of Co. Cork VEC. In 1999, he was elected Vice-chairperson of the VE Committee and in 2004, he became its Chairperson.

For the last number of years Noel has represented Co. Cork VEC on IVEA Standing Council and has served as Vice-president for the past six years. During his time in IVEA, Noel has also chaired a number of distinguished negotiating committees including: the national Consultative Forum of management and vocational sector trade unions responsible for the development of key policies on issues such as workplace bullying, harassment, grievance etc. and, the Bilateral Steering Committee concerned to discussions around the future administration of student support schemes.

On taking up the Presidency, Noel paid particular tribute to outgoing IVEA President Cllr Mary Bohan for her sterling commitment to the organisation and the principles enshrined in vocational education embedded in the culture of our communities. Noel says that he is looking forward to the challenge even though these are difficult times but comments that *"the VEC sector is robust and our schools, colleges and education centres continue to expand. All of us working in the vocational education sector seek to embrace positive change in order to provide the highest quality educational services to the students that we serve"*.



## Clonburris School – A Partnership between Co. Dublin VEC and Educate Together

In July, Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills, Ms Mary Coughlan TD, announced that the new second-level school in Clonburris, Lucan, would be established as a VEC school formally in partnership with Educate Together.

With a population of some 250,000, South Dublin has a high proportion of young people with 38% of the population under the age of 25. The new Clonburris Community College will be amongst the most modern schools in the country, providing a broad range of high quality education services to the Lucan area.

Speaking on behalf of County Dublin VEC, Dr Marie Griffin, Chief Executive Officer, commented that *"the Tánaiste's decision marks an exciting new departure in second level education. Co. Dublin VEC looks forward to working closely with Educate Together to provide a school at Clonburris that caters for the whole community and for all of the existing primary schools in the area"*.

## The Public Service Croke Park Agreement

The Agreement between the Government and public service trade unions negotiated in Croke Park last June is designed to overhaul and reorganise the public service in terms of efficiencies, in return for certain guarantees for public sector workers. The deal provides for no further pay cuts up to 2014, a mechanism for the reversal of existing pay cuts over time and no compulsory redundancies. In return, sectoral trade unions are to give more in terms of flexibility, efficiencies and inputs.

Teachers are to give an additional hour per week for school planning, CPD etc., and to be available for three timetabled class periods per week under the substitution and supervision scheme. In addition, there is to be a cross-sectoral redeployment scheme for surplus teachers and a review of the teacher contract.

VEC administrative and support staff are also to have a contract review and are to co-operate with shared services, VEC amalgamation, and redeployment across the public service.

Special Needs Assistants will be required to co-operate with redeployment within

schools, a review of existing employment terms and flexible deployment during non-instruction days.

At second level, ASTI was first to lift its non-co-operation directives and enter clarification talks with the Department of Education and Skills and management bodies. The union will then put the clarified terms to its members for ratification. The result of the TUI ballot on November 5th, allowed for it to also enter clarification talks.

On November 8th and following a ballot of members, TUI lifted union directives which had banned co-operation with the rotation of post of responsibility duties, parent-teacher meetings outside of school hours, staff meetings outside of school time and involvement in school development planning meetings. TUI is also now engaged in clarification talks with the Department on elements of the *Croke Park Agreement*.

Following the conclusion of these talks, the unions will put the clarifications to a ballot of their members and if accepted, the way would be clear to fully advance the outcomes of the *Croke Park Agreement*.



# OECD Review of Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Ireland

In 2009, the OECD undertook a review of vocational education and training (VET) in Ireland as part of its *Learning for Jobs* review of VET systems in 17 OECD countries. The report for Ireland (*Learning for Jobs; OECD Reviews of Vocational Education and Training – Ireland, OECD 2010*) was published in February and the full text of the report is available to download from: <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/2/6/44592419.pdf>

The review, which looks at initial VET in schools, colleges, workplaces and other institutions, was designed to provide policy advice about how countries might make their VET systems more responsive to labour market needs. Each country's review assesses the challenges faced by the country's VET system and presents an integrated set of recommendations. In the full country reports, each recommendation is described in detail. While the OECD's summary of the Irish report (*set out below*) is clear and concise, it is well worthwhile reading the full report as it provides a complete backdrop to each recommendation – the associated challenge/s, the supporting arguments and issues around implementation.

## Strengths of Irish VET

- There is a good range of provision of different types of VET at post-secondary level, targeted at a wide range of different client groups, including those in and out of work and with second chance opportunities.
- The national qualifications framework is comprehensive, integrating both vocational and general qualifications and includes a strong commitment to the avoidance of dead-ends and pathways of progression.
- Collaboration with social partners is well-established and takes place at most relevant levels.
- The apprenticeship system is well-structured with a systematic blend of on and off-the-job elements.
- At high level there is good co-operation between the two lead departments; with little sense of rivalry. *The National Skills Strategy* ([www.skillsstrategy.ie](http://www.skillsstrategy.ie)) provides for common objectives.
- There are some innovative ways of engaging employers in a bottom-up approach to provision such as Skillnets – an initiative widely supported by employers.

## Challenges facing Irish VET

- The current economic crisis is making intense demands on the system to provide education and training for a sharply increasing number of people and poses serious challenges in particular to the apprenticeship system.
- Apprenticeships are limited to a narrow set of occupations. Workplace training is insufficiently used in many VET programmes.
- Many of those looking after VET students, in particular those in companies, lack pedagogical training.
- Weak literacy and numeracy are serious problems among many learners but problems are often not identified in time or adequately addressed.
- FÁS, the Irish National Training and Employment Authority, is a large body with multiple missions. Evaluations and

data to assess its efficiency and effectiveness are lacking.

- Data on labour market outcomes are fragmented and research on VET is scarce. The wide range of VET programmes has not been systematically evaluated.
- Career guidance services are fragmented and weakly underpinned by information on labour market opportunities.

## Recommendations

1. Review the apprenticeship system to improve its efficiency and fairness in addressing the skills needs of the labour market. Make extensive use of workplace training in all VET programmes building on the existing types of provision and the experience with apprenticeship.
2. Respond to the crisis, both modifying and reinforcing existing measures.
  - Offer differentiated support to redundant apprentices, depending on their occupation and how far they have already progressed in their apprenticeship.
  - Review, immediately, the Employer Based Redundant Apprentice Rotation Scheme with a view to shifting the resources involved to more cost-effective across-the-board measures in support of redundant apprentices.
  - Consider measures to retain young people in education and training where the benefits outweigh the costs.
  - Carefully target education and training programmes for adult learners at their particular skills needs as well as the needs of the labour market.
3. Conduct a review of FÁS training services to enhance mechanisms for accountability and quality improvement. This would involve an improvement in the quality of data and evaluation and consultation with employers.
4. Systematically identify the literacy and numeracy problems of those who come into contact with training services and provide basic skills' support to those in need.
5. As a means of enhancing the competences of the VET workforce, ensure that all teachers, trainers and instructors have some pedagogical training and as a longer-term goal, offer pedagogical training to supervisors of VET students (e.g. apprentices, trainees) in companies. Encourage convergence in the qualification requirements for teaching in different sectors of the VET system.
6. Create an instrument to track progression through the education and training system, undertake routine evaluation of programmes and pursue economic analysis such as cost-benefit studies of apprenticeships. Encourage more research on VET. Create a comprehensive website with career guidance information.

As well as publishing individual country reports, the OECD also published a comparative report across the 17 countries that were reviewed. This report is particularly interesting in that it provides the reader with an opportunity to see, at a glance, the strengths and weaknesses of each countries' VET system. It also points the reader in the direction of international 'best practice'. The full text of the comparative report *Learning for Jobs, OECD 2010*, may be purchased from the OECD online bookshop. Readers can

obtain useful insights into its findings from [http://www.oecd.org/document/61/0,3343,en\\_2649\\_39263238\\_43736957\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_37455,00.html](http://www.oecd.org/document/61/0,3343,en_2649_39263238_43736957_1_1_1_37455,00.html). This site also provides access to a useful one-page summary of the principal pointers for VET policy development that emerged from the review of all 17 countries. This summary is set out below. The full country reports for each of the 17 countries involved in the reviews are also available free of charge from this site.

Overall findings from *The Jobs for Work* are relevant to all involved in both the development of VET policy and the overall management of VET programmes. Indeed, they are relevant to all involved at any level in the provision of VET.

### **Learning for Jobs: VET Pointers for Policy Development**

#### **Provide the Right Mix of Skills for the Labour Market**

- For vocational programmes beyond secondary level, share the costs between government, employers and individual students according to the benefits obtained.
- Provide a mix of VET training places that reflects both student preferences and employer needs. Achieve this through provision of workplace training and through planning and incentive mechanisms.
- Engage employers and unions in curriculum development and ensure that the skills taught correspond to those needed in the modern workplace.
- Through VET systems, provide young people with generic, transferable skills to support occupational mobility and lifelong learning, and with occupationally-specific skills that meet employers' immediate needs.
- Ensure all students in vocational programmes have adequate numeracy and literacy skills to support lifelong learning and career development. Identify and tackle weaknesses in this area.

#### **Reform career guidance to deliver effective advice for all**

- Develop a coherent career guidance profession, independent from psychological counseling and well-informed by labour market information.
- Provide adequate resources for career guidance and its pro-active delivery.
- Ensure an independent base to support objective career guidance.
- Provide good sources of information about careers and courses.
- Build a comprehensive framework of guidance through partnership with employers.
- Ensure that career guidance initiatives are properly evaluated.

#### **Ensure that teachers and trainers are well prepared with industry experience**

- Recruit sufficient teachers and trainers for VET institutions, and ensure this workforce is well-acquainted with the needs of modern industry. To this end:
  - ✓ Encourage trainers in VET institutions to spend some of their time working in industry.
  - ✓ Promote flexible pathways of recruitment and make it easier for those with industry skills to become part of the workforce of VET institutions through effective preparation.

- Provide appropriate pedagogical and other preparation for trainers (including supervisors) of interns, trainees and apprentices in workplaces, adapting the level of preparation to the nature of the workplace learning being provided.
- Encourage interchange and partnership between VET institutions and industry, so that vocational teachers and trainers spend time in industry to update their knowledge, and vocational trainers in firms spend some time in VET institutions to enhance their pedagogical skills.

#### **Make full use of workplace training**

- Make substantial use of workplace training in initial VET.
- Ensure that the framework for workplace training encourages both employers and students to participate.
- Ensure workplace training is of good quality, through an effective quality assurance system and a clear contractual framework for apprenticeships.
- Balance workplace training by other provision (e.g. training workshops in schools) where other learning environments work better, or if workplace training is not available.
- Devise effective responses to the current economic downturn, to sustain workplace training, and cope with increased demand for full-time VET.

#### **Develop tools to engage stakeholders and promote transparency**

- Engage employers and unions in VET policy and provision through effective mechanisms.
- Systematically engage with employers, trade unions and other key stakeholders to develop and implement qualification frameworks, supported by strengthened quality assurance.
- Adopt standardised national assessment frameworks to underpin quality and consistency in training provision.
- Strengthen data on labour market outcomes of VET and provide the institutional capacity to analyse and disseminate that data.



*Gearóid Ó Brádaigh, former CEO, Co. Westmeath VEC, pictured outside the Four Courts. Gearóid was called to the Bar by the Chief Justice in the Supreme Court.*



# The Work of the Equality Mainstreaming Unit with the VEC Sector

By Stefania X. Minervino, Development Officer at the Equality Authority



The Equality Mainstreaming Unit (EMU) is one of the initiatives set up under the Human Capital Investment Operational Programme 2007-2013. The EMU is based in the Equality Authority.

The specific objective of the Unit is to facilitate and support institutional change within providers of vocational education and training, labour market programmes and small and medium enterprises, by strengthening their capacity to combat discrimination, to promote equality and to accommodate diversity. This is achieved by providing:

- Support packages for equality mainstreaming approaches to providers of vocational education and training and labour market programmes;
- Consultancy support to support small to medium enterprises in promoting planned and systematic approaches to workplace equality;
- Support for the development of sectoral approaches/projects to promote workplace equality;
- The development of research and resource materials.

Indeed the Unit has worked very closely with the vocational sector particularly over the past few years. In collaboration with the IVEA, FESS and the Department of Education, the EMU held an event on May 28th last, for VEC personnel involved in the drafting of education plans and/or implementing FETAC standards in relation to equality. The aim of this event was to disseminate learning from three pilot projects that were funded by the Equality Mainstreaming Unit. Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills, Mr Seán Haughey TD, opened the event and officially launched 'Equality in a Time of Change, Conference Papers 2007-2009'.

County VECs including Waterford, Dublin and Wicklow, presented their Equality Mainstreaming projects conducted in 2009.

Currently, the EMU has established a panel of trainers to deliver Equality Mainstreaming training to VECs wishing



Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills, Seán Haughey TD launching *Equality in a Time of Change, Conference Papers 2007-2009*.

to embed equality into their education plans or indeed willing to carry out equality proofing and/or equality action planning in relation to their policies and programmes.

The EMU also held its sixth annual conference on 'Mainstreaming Equality – Promoting Equality and Accommodating Diversity in Further Education, Training and Labour Market Programmes' on 9th November. This year's conference focused on the theme of planning for equality and continued to explore the theme of equality mainstreaming in

the design and delivery of vocational education, training and labour market programmes. The conference offered participants a chance to develop equality mainstreaming competencies through interactive learning workshops.

Conference papers from previous conferences held in 2007-2009 are available for download on the website.

## More Equality News!

### Guidelines for Second Level Schools on Embedding Equality in School Development Planning

The Guidelines, prepared in partnership with the School Development Planning Initiative and launched on 24th June last, provide:

- An overview of the equality issues across the nine grounds that can arise in second-level schools;
- Describe how equality can inform the process of preparing a school development plan;
- Provide practical advice for second-level schools on how they can identify equality objectives and take steps to achieve those objectives.



Conference delegates



John Ryan, IVEA, addressing delegates at the conference in May

## Soon to launch a website for Community National Schools

The establishment of pilot Community National Schools under the patronage of VECs represents a new departure in the options for parents and guardians of primary school going children in Ireland. The VECs' important patronage role will be copper fastened by legislation currently passing through the Houses of the Oireachtas.

Following prescribed guidelines and curricula for National Schools as set down by the Department of Education and Skills, Community National Schools seek to provide a primary school educational experience that respects each child's uniqueness and cultivates each child's potential through approaches that are child-centred, inclusive and founded on a commitment to contemporary, high quality teaching and learning methodologies.

Being multi-belief schools operating through an ethos of respect for all beliefs, both religious and non-religious, Community National Schools provide a multi-belief education programme making reasonable accommodation for the wishes of the child's parents/guardians, within the school setting delivered during the school day. This commitment is an important and distinguishing feature of these new primary schools.

Community National Schools are of the community – uniquely positioned in the heart of the local community and providing a welcoming, friendly, 'open door' approach to parental and community involvement. From a prospective parent/guardian's viewpoint, there is the confidence in knowing that Community National Schools are supported by the patronage of the local VEC.

Through the work undertaken by an IVEA task group drawing on skilled expertise from the vocational sector, a website will shortly be launched to provide information on the key principles which underpin the model of Community National Schools (CNS). It is envisaged that this website will provide important information to parents and guardians of what is both unique and similar about the CNS experience for their child.

IVEA wishes to thank the task group, the Department of Education and Skills, the parents and principals of Community National Schools who have contributed to the development of the website which is scheduled to go live before Christmas.

## The Employee Assistance Service

*by Susan Clarke, Vhi Corporate Solutions*

**The Employee Assistance Service provides confidential counselling to teachers and their immediate family members.**

We all experience personal and work concerns from time to time and we know that many situations improve with access to professional consultation. The Employee Assistance Service (EAS) is a confidential counselling and support service established in 2006 for teachers and their family members to provide them with assistance in coping with a variety of issues.

Given that we are living through a period of change and uncertainty, the EAS is arguably now, more than ever, a beneficial resource offering guidance and support in coping with these changes. This service has promoted the well-being of teachers over the past number of years. In a survey of those who have accessed the service 100% of respondents stated that they would recommend the service to others, while 94% indicated that it definitely improved their ability to manage the pressure of their situation.

The EAS is available to teachers whose positions are funded by the Department of Education and Skills, their spouses or partners, their dependents above the age of 16

and mother/father where appropriate and can be accessed by a dedicated freephone number or email address.

Vhi Corporate Solutions deliver the EAS and staff follow strict ethical guidelines and codes of practice which means that any contact with an individual remains confidential with no information made available to anyone without the individual's written consent. Any feedback provided to the Department is purely in general terms and anonymous in nature.

### What services are available?

- Telephone Counselling – single sessions or short-term structured counselling
- Face to Face counselling – up to six counselling sessions can be made available

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

### Accessing the EAS

The Service is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year by telephoning the freephone number 1800 411 057 or by emailing [eas@vhics.ie](mailto:eas@vhics.ie)





## Athlone Community College – national winners in debating and public speaking 2010

Athlone Community College won this year's *Concern National Debating Championship* and this year's *Mental Health Public Speaking Championship* representing a unique achievement for this progressive school.

Michelle McHugh, Mark Roche, Sorcha McManus and Gavin Ward won the *Concern National Debating Championship* held in University College Dublin in May. They proposed the motion "As the dust settles – Haiti can look forward to a brighter and better future". Athlone Community College is the first school to win the competition three times having previously been successful in 2007 and 2008.

The *Concern National Debating Championship* is the largest debating competition for secondary schools in Ireland with over 140 teams entering. Tutored by Mr Chris Forde, the winners received a trip to Rwanda to see Concern in action, on the ground.

Not to be outdone, the public speaking team of Caroline Dowling, Aoife Coyle,



Caroline Dowling, Aoife Coyle, Maggie Wallace and Bronwyn Reid-McDermott who won the National Public Speaking competition pictured with John Moloney TD, Minister with responsibility for Disability and Mental Health and Brian Howard CEO, Mental Health Ireland

Maggie Wallace and Bronwyn Reid-McDermott won the National Public Speaking competition organised by Mental Health Ireland in Trinity College Dublin speaking to "Prosperity is but a shadow of the past, recession is the challenge for the present – What's our plan for the future"?

Over 180 teams entered the competition

and the team winners received a trip to Brussels, Bruges and Ghent. They also spoke at the Mental Health Ireland conference in Galway in May and were invited by Minister John Moloney TD to join a committee dealing with mental health issues for the young. Mr Chris Forde similarly mentored the team and our congratulations to him, the students and all concerned.

## Coláiste na hInse - Handover of the contract for the construction of a new 1,000 pupil school



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

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills, Ms Mary Coughlan TD, visited Laytown in Co. Meath on 28th July, for the formal handover of the contract for the construction of a new 1,000 pupil post-primary school on the educational campus in Bettystown. The new school building will cater for some 1,000 students and will be built and equipped to the highest standard to meet the needs of today's learners.

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills, Ms Mary Coughlan TD, congratulated all those who had helped bring the project to this stage and commented that she very much looked forward to its completion on time and on budget.

Mr Peter Kierans CEO, Co. Meath VEC welcomed the development of Coláiste na hInse as the ninth post-primary school under Co. Meath VEC and he assured

everyone that it would become a focal point for community activity in the area.

Mr Thomas Byrne TD, welcomed the

historic development for the Laytown area and complimented Co. Meath VEC on their great work in getting the project to this stage.



Pictured (l to r): Back Row: Ms Helen Loftus, Deputy Principal, Coláiste na hInse; Mr Tommy Grimes, Chairman, County Meath VEC; Ms. Catherine Sammon, Elliot Sammon Group; Mr Thomas Byrne, TD; Senator James Carroll; Mr Wayne Harding, Co. Meath VEC; Mr Tommy Byrne; Mr Pat Boshell, Co. Meath VEC. Front Row: Mr Peter Kierans CEO, Co. Meath VEC, Ms Helena Geoghegan, student, Coláiste na hInse; Tánaiste & Minister for Education and Skills, Mary Coughlan TD; Mr Noel Elliot, Elliot Sammon Group; Ms Anne Marie McCarrick, Principal, Coláiste na hInse and Ms Celine McMahon, student, Coláiste na hInse



## St Ailbe's School to represent Ireland in the *Mind Your Rights* campaign



A group of first year students in St Ailbe's School, Tipperary Town were chosen as national winners of the *Mind Your Rights* campaign, organised by Leargas in conjunction with Generation Europe. Over 300 schools in five different countries participated in this competition which asked students to study the new European Charter of Fundamental Rights and to produce a visual representation of their work in the form of a mural.

This September, artist Niamh Synnott began working with students in St Ailbe's to realise the project. She will facilitate work with the students over a number of weeks, helping them develop their artistic creativity, as well as their understanding of the *European Charter of Fundamental Rights*. Together, the students will create a sculptural mural, which will be constructed as a permanent fixture in St Ailbe's School.

*The European Charter of Fundamental Rights* is the first formal document of the European Union that combines all the values and fundamental rights which European citizens enjoy. These include economic, social, civil and political rights. *Mind Your Rights* is aimed at students aged 13-16 and can be used by CSPE, European Studies, Religion or English teachers in conjunction with Art teachers.



Students from Ms McCormack's first year CSPE class undertook the project as part of their exploration of human rights. The charter was analysed, with students spending many weeks looking at how these rights affect their lives and the lives of others. The analysis took many forms, including poetry, computer blogs and even a musical interpretation developed and created with the assistance of Mr Kearney, Music teacher.

As part of the guidelines, the students'

analysis was to culminate in the Art class, where a specific right was chosen by each individual and interpreted in a visual way. Under the direction of their Art teacher, Ms Lewis, this class group used a system of tiles to draw and highlight the symbols, imagery and words that best interpreted their weeks of preparatory work. Tiles were then assembled as part of a class mosaic.

Teachers involved in the project provided feedback on this teaching tool and supported their information with evidence of the ongoing work of the students including their final visual piece. All feedback was reviewed and evaluated. Furthermore, in each participating country, the school that provided the most constructive and convincing feedback would have the outputs of this activity converted into a public work of art – a ceramic mural.

At the end of April, St Ailbe's discovered that they had been chosen as one of three finalists in Ireland and received a visit from Ms Naoise Byrne, Leargas, Ms Niamh Synnott (artist) and Ms Annika Stienen, Generation Europe, who interviewed teachers and students about their work of the previous months. By the end of May, the students were informed of the great news that they had been chosen as the Irish representative in the competition.



County Wicklow Vocational Education Committee  
Coiste Gairmoideachais Chontae Chill Mhantáin

## County Wicklow VEC celebrates the opening of school extensions



Co. Wicklow VEC celebrates the opening by Tanaiste and Minister for Education and Skills, Ms Mary Coughlan TD, of school extensions to Avondale Community College and St Kevin's Community College





## Co. Laois VEC project receives the European 'Label for Languages' Award

Co. Laois VEC Adult Learning Centre project entitled "Getting to Grips with the English Language" has received a European award for languages – the *European Language Label 2010*, at a ceremony in NUI Maynooth. The *Language Label* is a European-wide award that recognises creative and innovative ways of teaching and learning languages.

The project aims to support English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) learners from various ethnic backgrounds to break down language and communication barriers and give them the necessary English language skills to integrate more effectively into Irish society. Project activities have included tours of Portlaoise Library; meeting local Home-School Community Liaison teachers; anti-racism and inter-cultural initiatives; an artistic endeavour with the Arts Office at Laois Co. Council; a community radio documentary series entitled "How to Learn English in Ireland" and a peer mentoring programme where more advanced English language students facilitate English language conversation classes.

Feedback from project participants indicate that learning English is the first and most fundamental step towards involvement in their local communities and towards full and equal participation in Irish society. The jury for the award commented that:



*Pictured: Professor Tom Collins, Dean of Teaching and Learning, NUI Maynooth presents the European Language Label Award to Sandra Doyle (Project Co-ordinator) and Kamila Rozkrut (ESOL Learner) at a ceremony in NUI Maynooth.*

*"positive participation and positive feedback from the project have encouraged learners to continue with their language studies and progress into further or higher education".*

Co. Laois VEC has previously been successful in gaining national recognition for projects demonstrating innovation, creativity and collaboration. In 2009 for example, Co. Laois VEC received an AONTAS National Star Award (Showcasing Teamwork, Awarding Recognition) in the Leinster Regional category for their winning

project "Integration...we all play a part" and in 2010, received a National Star Award in the *Once Off Initiatives* category for a radio project entitled "How to Learn English in Ireland".

The *European Language Label Award* is co-ordinated by the European Commission and managed in Ireland by Leargas. The awards for 2010 were presented by Professor Tom Collins, Dean of Teaching and Learning, NUI Maynooth, at a ceremony on September 27th.

## Co. Galway VEC hosts Grundtvig Lifelong Learning Partnership Conference



*Brian Barrett Co. Development Board; Eithne Nic Dhonnchadha, AEO, Co. Galway VEC; Jarlath Mc Donagh, VEC Board, Co. Galway VEC; Minister of State, Mr Seán Haughey TD; Helen Keogh, National VTOS Coordinator; Seosamh Mac Donncha, CEO, Co. Galway VEC and Bláthnaid Ni Chinnéide, NALA*

Co. Galway VEC is co-ordinating the Grundtvig Lifelong Learning Partnership with five European partners; Lithuania, Portugal, Germany, Austria and the United Kingdom. Their Irish partner is Knockanrawley Resource Centre, Tipperary. The objective of the Partnership is to analyse and share examples of good practise in quality education provision and a two-day conference took place in June to promote this. The conference was opened by Seosamh Mac Donncha CEO, Co. Galway VEC and addressed by the Minister for Lifelong Learning, Mr Seán Haughey TD.

Speaking at the conference, Minister for Lifelong Learning, Seán Haughey



TD commented that *"The vital role the European Union plays in lifelong learning in this country through funding programmes like Grundtvig makes a significant contribution to the quality and level of adult education services provided."*

*"This important programme is open to all*

*groups or institutions involved in adult education and focuses on education for adults, whether through formal, non-formal or informal learning. Grundtvig seeks to improve the quality and European dimension of adult education in the broadest sense and to make life-long learning opportunities more widely*

*available to all of Europe's citizens".*

Co. Galway CEC Adult Education Officer, Ms Eithne Nic Dhonnchadha said that *"transnational sharing of best practice will lead to greater participation in education by adults which, in turn, will lead to economic and social growth".*



## Kerry Education Service's adult learner addresses Adult Education Guidance Services' Conference

Ms Ann Ryle, a Kerry Education Service adult education student from Tralee, recently addressed a conference to mark the 10th anniversary of Adult Education Guidance Services in Ireland.

The conference was organised to celebrate the achievements of the forty Adult Education Guidance Services across Ireland and to highlight the valuable work being done by the staff. This was the theme of Ann's address to the Conference as she described her own educational journey. Ann also spoke about her first encounter with the Kerry Adult Guidance Service and her ongoing relationship with the Service and how it has helped and supported her over many years.



*Pictured are Mr Seamus Hempenstall, Principal Officer, Further Education Section, Department of Education and Skills with Ms Ann Ryle, Adult Learner*

*"When I was approached to speak at the conference, I was honoured, privileged and excited that I was able to share my story. At the end of the conference Professor Tony Watts, who addresses guidance conferences all around the world, told me that he had never actually heard an adult learner speak at such conferences before and this gave me great confidence for the future. It was good for me personally to stand before these people, and to stand before all the guidance counsellors in Ireland, and the people from KES. I was glad to see as an adult, what I have achieved through going back into education."*

*"I hope for the future that people will take something away from the day. That people will use the guidance services if they feel that they are in difficulty in their lives and that people who have come back to education or people who have lost their jobs in the last sixteen months or so, stick with it and reach for the stars, as I did".*

Ann Ryle, Adult Learner

Ms Sharon Browne, Adult Education Officer, KES commented: *"Ann's achievements are all her own. Here at KES we are delighted for her. Ann is an inspiration to us all for her tenacity and dedication".*

## IVEA NOW ON TWITTER

<http://www.twitter.com/IRISHVEA>

IVEA launched its Twitter site at Congress in September. To follow IVEA on Twitter:

1. Go to <http://www.twitter.com/IRISHVEA>

2. Press the  button

OR

Get updates via SMS by texting **follow IRISHVEA** to **51210**



*Signatories to the multi-Sectoral Guidelines on Third Party Violence, including EFEE General Secretary, Bianka Stege (second from right) and ETUCE represented by David Poissonneau (far right). The official signing of the multi-sectoral agreement on third party violence took place after the Social Dialogue Liaison Forum on 30 September last. IVEA is an active member of EFEE.*

## IVEA Congress 2010 in review

The 106th IVEA Congress took place in the picturesque Heritage Golf and Spa Resort in Killenard. Focusing on the theme of *Education – Equity and Opportunity*, this year's conference marked an important date in the education sector calendar with presenters and delegates contributing widely to the conference debate and motions,

Congress was jointly opened by Cllr James Deegan, Cathaoirleach, Laois County Council and Cllr Mary Sweeney, Cathaoirleach, Co Laois VEC. The first afternoon saw orders of business including the AGM where IVEA General Secretary Michael Moriarty, presented the Annual Report of the work undertaken by the Association in 2009/10. The Honorary Treasurers' Report, presented on behalf of the Treasurers by Mr Paddy Lavelle CEO followed. Congress expressed its deepest appreciation to Mr Ted Fitzgerald, outgoing Honorary Treasurer, for the work undertaken by him both as a member of Standing Council and IVEA Treasurer in

past years. The remaining afternoon was taken up with lively debate on a number of motions most noticeably the debate on the effects of the moratorium on VEC school and administration staffs.

Day two of Congress commenced with motions which led to the key-note speeches centred on the conference theme: **Education – Equity & Opportunity**. Panel members comprised Dr Emer Smyth, ESRI; Dr Ciarán Sugrue, University of Cambridge and Dr Harold Hislop, Chief Inspector, Department of Education and Skills with each speaker taking a slightly different approach in interpreting the theme which was met with a plethora of comments, commendations and questions from the crowded conference centre. An overview of key elements in each of the three panel speeches is provided.

The conference resumed after lunch with motions. IVEA was greatly honoured to have Ms Hélène Clark, Director,

EU Directorate General for Education, Culture & Lifelong Learning: Policies & Programmes, address conference delegates speaking on the *“European Commission's vision on the Role of Vocational Education and Training (VET) in the context of the broader EU agenda”*.

IVEA Congress 2010 concluded with its always thought-provoking and sometimes controversial Presidential and Ministerial addresses. Michael Moriarty, General Secretary IVEA, referenced a number of issues raised by the Tánaiste in the context of the window provided by the 'Vote of Thanks'.

Congress closed with the announcement of the IVEA Officer Board 2010/11 and the conference gala dinner attended by guests from the education and wider public service sectors. Photographs from the conference can be viewed on <http://www.ivea.ie/events/congress/congress.shtml>

## What the presenters said...

### Panel debate on the theme *Education – Equity & Opportunity*



**Dr Emer Smyth** is Programme Co-ordinator of Education Research at the ESRI. Her speech to Congress 2010 was entitled ***“Educational (In)Equity: What Can Schools Do?”***

Dr Smyth examined the effect of a child's social background on such yardsticks as their reading and Mathematics performance at primary level; the grades they achieve in the Junior Certificate exam; whether they stay on in school to complete Leaving Certificate; the grades they achieve in the Leaving Certificate; whether they go on to third level education and other performance indices. She noted

that the variation in the social background and prior 'ability' profile of students was exacerbated by a multiplier effect in schools with higher concentrations of disadvantage, including lower attendance rates, lower rates of Leaving Certificate completion and lower Junior and Leaving Certificate achievement levels.

Dr Smyth went on to note the consequences of educational inequality for individuals and society, which included:

- Early school leavers are more likely to be unemployed and, if unemployed, to be unemployed for a longer period
- Early school leavers are more likely to work in less skilled jobs and receive lower average pay, resulting in a significant lifetime gap in earnings

- Early school leavers are more likely to be in poor/fair rather than good health, and they have higher rates of anxiety/depression, higher rates of smoking and heavy drinking
- Broader social outcomes such as higher rates of lone motherhood, the vast majority of those in prison are early school leavers, and consequential inequity in educational outcomes among the next generation.

Dr Smyth asked the big question... ***“Can schools make a difference?”*** She examined two aspects of school organisation and process, ability grouping and school climate. She compared the implementation and outcomes of streaming between middle class schools and working class



schools, and between boys and girls, concluding that mixed ability grouping had better educational outcomes overall.

Finally, in answer to *"What can schools do?"* Dr Smyth examined the aspects of school process which foster academic and social development and thus educational equity for all students – namely, a positive school climate, a positive disciplinary climate, mixed ability grouping and differentiated teaching methods and more active learning approaches.

Dr Smyth's blueprint for addressing educational inequity is challenging for schools, given the strain experienced by schools – but arguably, not impossible.



**Dr Ciarán Sugrue**, Reader in the Faculty of Education at the University of Cambridge, examined *"The Role of the State"* under the Congress theme.

Dr Sugrue pointed out that many of the policy indicators in Celtic Tiger years all pointed in a similar direction – namely that our increasingly acquisitive and consumerist society had exacerbated inequalities rather than minimising them. One of the major mechanisms to promote equality at the disposal of Governments, policy-makers and professionals, was the education system. Consequently, Dr Sugrue felt it was appropriate to ask how the Irish State's leadership had fared in this regard? He argued the current crisis provided an important moment for reflection on the kind of society we want, even if the necessary resources were profligately depleted.

Noting the many aspects to this complex question, Dr Sugrue focussed on the extent to which current legislation, attendant policies and practices enabled principals and teachers to promote equality in a system that is largely denominational. What was the role of the State in a liberal pluralist democracy in this regard? After an examination of the key responsibilities in the promotion and nurturing of pluralist democracy, the report card on the State (as delivered by Dr Sugrue),

indicated that it was failing to live up to its responsibilities and furthermore, current legislation made it inevitable that the practices of principals and teachers were compromised in this regard.

Consequently, he concluded, it was necessary for the State to act on, and for politicians and policy makers to take seriously, the following **recommendations**, if the Republican ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity were not to remain mere rhetoric but were to become embedded in the routines of schooling...

- Review and amend the Education Act, 1998, (as a barrier to equality)
- Have oversight of religious education in all schools
- Take more seriously the responsibility for moral formation as well as education for democratic participation in the public sphere
- Consult more widely on the nature of State responsibility for public education and develop a politics of the role of the State with regard to citizenship, moral formation and the role of religious instruction in a pluralist democracy
- Develop more finely honed criteria for the evaluation of equality as a curricular aim.



**Dr Harold Hislop**, Chief Inspector at the Department of the Education and Skills, addressed *"The Importance of Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools"*

Dr Hislop stressed that promoting increased access, longer participation, greater achievement and better transition must be key goals in the drive towards improved equity.

Dr Hislop described the Department of Education's research and evidence-based approach to implementing and evaluating the policy initiatives aimed at delivering equality of opportunity in schools. The fieldwork for the thematic evaluation of *DEIS* implementation in 18 primary schools was undertaken in Spring 2010. Preliminary results revealed a significant

measurable effect on attendance in all but one school. Literacy levels were good or very good in 11 of the 18 primary schools, with less satisfactory improvement linked to insufficient monitoring of pupils' work and insufficient emphasis on the teaching of reading skills. For numeric teaching approaches, the research found that just over half of the schools rated as good, one excellent and two had significant weaknesses. Factors that contributed to the weaknesses included inadequate analysis and use of assessment data and insufficient challenging activities for the more able. The post-primary research Dr Hislop advised, was scheduled for autumn 2010.

Dr Hislop discussed the conclusions of the research which found evidence of positive leadership in effective schools, with principals creating a positive school culture. Teachers had consistently positive expectations about pupils' behaviour; promoted high levels of team work amongst students and were committed to strategic planning. Characteristic of effective schools were the belief that the school needed to adapt to students' needs and the careful use of assessment to establish learning needs, adjust infrastructure, monitor progress and provide real feedback. It was evident from the research, that progress needed to be measured, recorded and used to inform further planning.

Dr Hislop concluded that research showed that improving schools led to improved equity. It was important and necessary he said to *"constantly ask if we have the right mix of approaches and sufficient resources on which to base our policies for tackling inequality and to ensure that we use the resources that we do have to maximum effect for students"*.

## Presentation on the Role of Vocational Education and Training (VET) in the context of the broader EU agenda

Ms Clark stated that a major Commission objective was that by 2020, VET in Europe should contribute to both excellence and equity in EU lifelong learning systems, offering attractive, relevant, accessible and flexible training programmes. *"VET, (she said) should encourage transnational mobility of students and teachers"*. She described the Commission's *Youth on the Move* flagship initiative, launched in September 2010, which contained proposals to improve the performance of education and training systems at all levels; including VET and which highlighted the importance of learning mobility – supported by the EU through the Lifelong Learning Programme and more specifically its *Leonardo da Vinci* strand.

Ms Clark explained that VET could help improve the employability of young people, particularly hit by the economic crisis, with a youth unemployment rate which reached 20.2% in July for the EU. VET was also crucial for adults, increasingly being called upon to update and upgrade their skills. According to labour market forecasts, around 50% of jobs in 2020 would still require medium level



**Ms Hélène Clark**, Director for Lifelong Learning Policies and Programmes at the Directorate General for Education and Culture of the European Commission, addressed Congress on the *"European Commission's vision on the Role of Vocational Education and Training (VET) in the context of the broader EU agenda"*.

qualifications – mostly covered by the VET sector.

Ms Clark discussed the EU's *Europe 2020* strategy adopted in June 2010 which prioritised smart, sustainable and inclusive growth; an economy based on knowledge and innovation which was more resource efficient, climate-friendly and competitive. The two main targets of the *Europe 2020*

strategy were the reduction of early school leaving to 10% and the increase of tertiary attainment to 40% by 2020. Both targets depended largely on the performances of VET systems.

Ms Clark said that co-operation in VET at European level in recent years had created the foundation for a significant contribution to the *Europe 2020* strategy. The profile of VET had been raised and shared objectives, principles and common European instruments had been developed, including the European Qualifications Framework, the European Credit System for VET (ECVET), the quality assurance reference framework in VET (EQAVET) and the Europass (whose CV template had been used by almost 9 million EU citizens since 2005).

These encouraging results, she concluded, must be followed up by a clear and ambitious agenda for VET for the next 10 years. At the end of 2010, Ministers in charge of VET and European social partners would be adopting the *Bruges Communiqué* – a VET modernisation agenda up to 2020.

## IVEA Presidential and Ministerial Addresses



*IVEA President, Cllr Mary Bohan addressing Congress 2010*

In her Presidential address to the Congress, Mary Bohan called on the Government to lift the moratorium on replacing post of responsibility holders in schools and adult education officers in VEC adult education services; to commence immediately the process of establishing a fit-for-purpose in-school management system and to expand education and training provision for young, low skilled unemployed persons seeking to acquire skills relevant to tomorrow's workplace – or they will become permanently unemployable.

### According to IVEA President Bohan .....

#### **"Education and training are as important as banking to cohesion and prosperity"**

- 'Ireland is much more than a financial system ... the young people in our schools and colleges are our future. If we fail to facilitate the full flowering of their talents we will not only fail them individually but we will also fail Ireland'.
- 'The indiscriminate implementation of the moratorium on public service appointments has eroded in-school management structures to the extent that those who manage our schools are literally on their knees'.
- Principals say 'the strain on school management is intolerable - that they are 'left in an untenable position trying to do their own very demanding jobs while also carrying out the duties of several unreplaced post holders'.

#### **Fit for purpose in-school management system essential – otherwise school will fail.**

- 'The consequences of the moratorium are plain to see in our schools and colleges'.
- 'The pastoral care system ... is being dismantled'.
- 'Principal's role in leading teaching and learning has to be put on the back burner'.
  - '... Induction, mentoring and probation of newly qualified teachers receive less attention than is necessary...'.
  - 'Staff development and school planning ... are put on hold.'
  - Principals have insufficient time to address 'teacher underperformance...'.
  - '... A school's current entitlement to posts of responsibility is more a function of teacher retirement than anything else'.



- ❑ 'Fewer and fewer teachers are applying for principalships because the job is undoable – in the absence of a fit-for-purpose in-school management system'.
- 'We must find a way to put in place an efficient and fit-for-purpose in-school management system that facilitates the effective management of schools, the appropriate support and care of our students, the continuous improvement of school outcomes and, very significantly, the empowerment of our teachers and the development of school leaders – at every level of the school. Otherwise, our schools will fail'.
- 'We need a new approach that sets out clearly the in-school management functions that need to be undertaken in schools and then puts post holders in place to carry out those functions transparently and accountably'.

#### **Embargo on replacing AEOs undermines capacity of VECs to upskill adults**

- 'The continuation of the moratorium on replacing Adult Education Officers (AEOs) 'cripples VECs in their efforts to provide quality-assured further education and training to meet the needs of the burgeoning numbers of unemployed seeking to reconstruct their lives, in a world where the skill-set associated with almost every job is rising inexorably'.
- 'If we want to ensure that adult learners' needs are met in a quality assured way, adult education officers and those carrying out similar functions must be replaced as posts fall vacant. Otherwise, State resources will be wasted, rather than saved'.
- 'Public services will not be reformed by withdrawing resources randomly and that is how the moratorium is impacting on VEC adult and further education services'.

#### **Must ensure young, low skilled unemployed have a future**

- 'Thousands of young, unemployed people with low qualifications' ... unemployable unless they acquire skills relevant to tomorrow's workplace'.
- 'While the numbers in third level education increase, the numbers in further education...are effectively capped – PLCs, BTEI, VTOS, adult basic education programmes, the very programmes that could assist the low skilled'.

- '...the door to apprenticeships, traineeships and those programmes offered by VECs that provide work and life skills is bolted to many'.
- '...this autumn, demand for further education places is way in excess of supply. *What are those denied an education or training place to do with their day?*'
- '...we rightly encourage our young unemployed to undertake training or education but then, because provision is capped – many are left in no man's land'.
- '...when the economy picks up there will be jobs for all again – provided they are appropriately skilled. Clearly, something must be done urgently or we risk losing a generation forever'.
- '...economists tell us what needs to be done to turn things around but, by and large, this advice ignores the human dimension'.
- 'When the economy recovers, will those young people, who had to sit on the bench during the down turn, be able to avail of the work and life opportunities that will be presented to them?'.
- 'Unless there is real engagement with these young people ... there are real grounds for fearing that many will lose their way – in a twilight world of depression, dependency and dejection'.
- 'The magnitude of the current recession is such that its potential legacy is too frightening to imagine – UNLESS WE ACT NOW'.
- 'If we can save financial institutions that have behaved in a criminally negligent manner, we surely can attempt to construct a life raft to save a generation'.
- '...a sense of meaning in one's life is the key to human survival and personal growth ... we are depriving many young people of any sense of meaning. We are consigning them to a limbo – for an indeterminate period'.
- 'IVEA requests the Tánaiste to take a clear message back to the cabinet table: something must be done to give meaning and hope to the lives of these young people now – so that, one day, they too may take their place at the top table'.

#### **Aggregation of VECs ... appeal for common sense**

- 'IVEA has cogently argued for leaving

the current VEC structure in place, so we simply appeal for common sense. Why fix what is not broken?'

- 'Tánaiste, we know that you have an intimate appreciation of what VECs do and of the extent to which they are inextricably identified with their local government areas. We therefore ask that you look again at the proposal to amalgamate VECs before it is too late. Once a critical piece of social infrastructure is removed, it will be difficult, if not impossible, to recreate it'.

#### **Expanded remit for VECs**

- IVEA believes that VECs should be strengthened and given a wider remit so they may ... support the work of both the State and other education providers without ... diminishing the independence of these other providers'.

#### **IVEA welcomes**

- ❑ 'The NCCA's discussion paper around reforming Junior Cycle education.'
- ❑ 'The work of the Department in identifying areas that may offer potential for the Church to divest its patronage of certain primary schools' and, where such divestment occurs, IVEA hopes that the Community National School model – a multi-belief model – will be considered suited to providing for all faiths and none within the school'.
- ❑ 'The Tánaiste's decision to establish a Second-Level Patronage Advisory Body ... requires that a transparent process be put in place for allocating new school patronage...'
- ❑ 'The new second-level school in Lucan will be established under the patronage of Co Dublin VEC in partnership with Educate Together'.

#### **VECs working in partnership – designated community school model**

- 'VECs, since the 1970s, have worked in partnership with the Catholic and Protestant churches to establish some 40 designated community colleges. In these schools, the property is vested in the VEC, the VEC is the patron and the school is managed by a subcommittee of the VEC – on which all the partner trustees have equal representation'.

- 'The strength of the designated community college is the extent to which the VEC provides a wide range of support services to the colleges – education, administration, finance, personnel management, etc., thus freeing up the principal and deputy principal to lead the issues that really matter in the school – teaching, learning, pastoral care, staff development...'

In concluding remarks, President Bohan

said the 'capacity of VECs, to provide young and old with the skills and qualifications they require to make the most of their talents, is being seriously eroded' and 'unless this erosion is halted, the possibility of recreating a prosperous and cohesive Ireland may, itself, be put at risk'.

According to President Bohan, "notwithstanding the current economic climate, Ireland cannot neglect either the education of its young, or the upskilling of those

with relatively low skills. Doing so would simply return Ireland to the bad old days that it could well take us a lifetime to escape from. IVEA simply believes that all our futures can be much brighter if we ensure that our citizens are prepared for those futures – and education and training is very much the key to that preparation. As Intel's Jim O'Hara puts it: 'the education system is where you get the fundamentals, that's where you get the grounding'".



Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills, Ms Mary Coughlan, TD addressing conference delegates

### An overview of the Tánaiste's comments:

- "Dr T.K. Whitaker paid tribute to the VEC system as being flexible, adaptive and innovative... these attributes have endured to the present day.
- Your evident capacity to be flexible, responsive and creative in meeting Ireland's social and economic needs will be as vitally important. Into the medium terms there will continue to be significant constraints on the level of resources available for public services, including education.
- The Government wants to protect as far as possible front line services in education.
- Additional teaching posts, in line with the commitments in the Renewed Programme for Government, have been allocated. We have also proceeded with the commitment to restore certain grants to schools including support for book rental and loan schemes.
- We have provided limited alleviation of the moratorium on the filling of middle management posts in schools
- Quite simply, the moratorium is about achieving a reduction in the cost of the public payroll... The extent to which the moratorium can be alleviated therefore has to be extremely limited and I am not going to pretend otherwise.
- The transfer of responsibility for delivery of the State's skills training services and placing FÁS under the Department of Education and Skills is a positive move. By better alignment of skills...we can eliminate duplication.
- Significant progress has already been made on the implementation of the *National Skills Strategy*...however there remains a significant gap to close especially in relation to the targets aimed at the Leaving Certificate equivalent and lower levels of the NFQ.
- Initially €20 million was provided this year from the National Training Fund (NTF) in an Activation Fund. I know that the VEC CEOs and others voiced their concerns that more VECs were not successful in their tenders for the Fund. However, an additional €12 million was subsequently made available and further tenders, including a number of VEC tenders, were accepted for funding.
- In the area of school patronage, I would like to recognise the innovative role of the VEC sector in the development of community national schools.
- At second level, I have announced a framework for the recognition of new schools and I know that many VECs will seek to be actively involved in the implementation of this framework.
- I have asked my officials to examine...the possibility for further involvement of VECs in the delivery of building projects
- I believe empowering the VEC system through additional functions has great merit and I believe merging some VECs... will add momentum to what is possible.
- I also want to acknowledge the administrative and service improvements that are being implemented in relation to the Student Grant Schemes. The most noteworthy is the introduction of a new online grant application system for students.
- I want to create a new structure in the VEC sector that better positions the sector to support the evolution of service delivery not just in schools under the direct governance of a VEC but in the wider education area.
- This is an opportunity not a threat. It is about positioning a reformed VEC sector to contribute more significantly in driving an agenda of improved outcomes from education and training provision within its own schools and centres and in other programmes and initiatives where the VEC has involvement and linkages.
- Yes there will be fewer VECs but where there are mergers the new VEC will be of greater scale and better placed to take on new challenges".



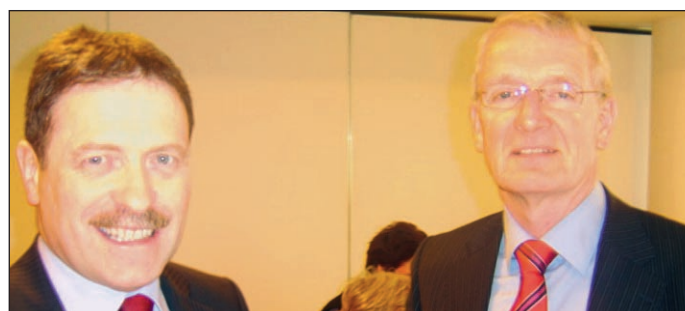
## Follow-up to the programme of national training seminars on *Managing Grievance effectively in the VEC Workplace*

Through the assistance of the Conciliation Service, Labour Relations' Commission, the Consultative Forum of IVEA, VEC NPF and vocational education sector trade unions recently concluded its round of training seminars devised to support both the operationalising of the Grievance Procedure (nationally adopted on 31 March 2010) and to train management and staff in VECs on skills to manage grievance/s at the earliest possible stage through positive interaction and skills enhancement. Arising from feedback provided at the training sessions, the Consultative Forum has developed a *Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)* document which seeks to address many of the issues raised in the course of the training programme. This FAQ is one of a number of documents developed to support awareness and application locally of the nationally agreed Grievance Procedure.

IVEA extends its appreciation to all participants, presenters and particularly to Mr Brendan Cunningham, his colleagues who delivered the training and LRC Directors, Mr Kevin Foley (Conciliation Service) and Ms Freda Nolan (Advisory Service). IVEA also acknowledges the support of partners on the Consultative Forum and in particular, Ms Gwen Moore, who co-ordinated the training sessions on the Forum's behalf.



*Delegates at the seminar in Galway*



*Edward McEvoy CEO and Breandán O'Calloran CEO at the seminar in Galway on Managing Grievance effectively in the VEC Workplace*

## Briefing sessions on the recently launched *Guidelines on Managing Safety and Health in Post-Primary Schools*

Ireland's post-primary schools have a valuable new resource to help them create and manage safe and healthy work and school environments following the publication of the *Guidelines on Managing Safety and Health in Post-Primary Schools*.

The Health and Safety Authority (HSA), the State Claims Agency, the Department of Education and Skills and the School Development Planning Initiative developed the Guidelines in response to a strong demand from the education sector for guidance to enable the sector better manage its legal obligations and responsibilities. The Guidelines are intended as a single

comprehensive guidance document and toolkit that reflects current legislative requirements and best practice. They do not place any additional responsibilities on schools beyond those that already exist.

The Guidelines set out a step-by-step approach to safety and health management that can be used by schools to develop new systems or to improve those already in place. They contain a suite of materials including a series of planning templates, a sample safety and health policy, management organisation charts and training and monitoring tools. Risk assessment templates for the most common hazards and risks found in the school environment are also provided by way of a resource.

Inspector Hilary Mooney from the HSA presented on the use of the Guidance document and other resources available for post-primary schools.

Information was also provided on the HSA suite of e-learning courses developed for teachers and pupils of post-primary schools. Included below is an outline of these courses:

- (a) An Introduction to Managing Safety and Health in Schools  
Course duration: 100 minutes, self-directed learning.  
This course was developed for CEO's, Boards of Management, Principals and teachers who are involved in



*Ms Hilary Mooney, Inspector, Health and Safety Authority, delivering the sessions*

the management of schools. The aim of the course is to increase awareness of safety, health and welfare matters and legislative requirements among school managers and other employees in the school environment.

- (b) Safety and Health in the Technology Classroom for Schools  
*Course duration: 140 minutes, self-directed learning*

This course was primarily developed for teachers of Technology. This course focuses on safety and health matters relating to specific subject areas such as Metalwork and Woodwork and provides assistance in identifying risks which may occur and guidance as to how such risks might be eliminated or reduced.

- (c) Safety and health in the Science Laboratory for Schools

*Course duration: 140 minutes, self-directed learning*

This course was developed primarily for Science teachers. This course focuses on safety and health matters relating specifically to Science subjects and provides help in identifying risks which may occur and guidance as to how these might be eliminated or reduced.

Participants at the information sessions were given an overview of free resources available for post-primary schools engaged in

teaching “Choose Safety” or the “Transition Unit” which has been ratified by the NCCA. To complement the existing coursework and workbooks, the HSA has also produced an e-learning course “Get Safe – Work Safe”.

Workplace Safety and Health for Senior Cycle Students

*Course duration: 90 minutes of self-directed learning.*

This course was developed as a resource for over 300 post-primary schools already teaching the health and safety course; *Choose Safety or the Transition Unit – Student Safety in the Workplace*. The e-learning course can be completed in the classroom or at home by pupils. This course introduces students to the principles of safety and health. It is useful for LCA, and LCVA and senior cycle students whose programme of learning includes some form of work experience and those who are actively engaged in part-time or holiday work. The unit is relevant to all students as future members of the workforce.

Information sessions took place on various dates in late September and early October 2010 in Offaly, Cork and Kildare. IVEA wishes to express its sincere appreciation to the CEOs and staff of each host VEC and to Ms Hilary Mooney in delivering the training sessions.

## Implementing Effective Risk Management in VECs

*By Victor Hrymak, Risk Management Consultant and Lecturer in Environmental Health and Safety for Dublin Institute of Technology*

**Risk management** is a relatively recent term and is used by safety practitioners to cover all risks encountered by organisations. The following familiar hazard categories are now considered to be part of risk management:

- Health and safety
- Fire safety
- Food safety
- Environmental management
- Business risk

The recently launched Irish Public Bodies Mutual Insurances Ltd. publication entitled “*VEC Risk – excellence in governance through best practice risk management*” further explains risk management. This publication is available from IPB; contact details are available from [www.ipb.ie](http://www.ipb.ie)

The first stage in risk management is to find out exactly what risks are present. This is done by carrying out a risk assessment for each building and function within the VEC’s remit. This is a very important stage for the simple reason that if you don’t know what the risk is, you cannot manage it. Therefore it is important that the risk assessor is competent in assessing multi-site and multi-hazard facilities.

This risk assessment will include three distinct components:

1. A survey of buildings
2. An analysis of any documentation related to risk management
3. Interviews with management teaching and service staff.

A survey will reveal any potential risks from the building such as disrepair, lack of food storage facilities, substandard hygiene facilities, a lack of available fire exits or automatic smoke detection, etc.

An analysis of the documentation will reveal existing risk assessments, safety statements, training records, technical inspection reports and past regulatory involvement.

Interviews with staff are very important as local knowledge will reveal risks that the assessor cannot discover by survey and documentation alone. From past experience, such risks have included machinery being used incorrectly, unsafe work practices by contractors, violent and aggressive pupils and parents and the lack of supervision for external groups using VEC buildings.

The assessor will also need to look at how risk in all its manifestations is being managed at the school level. Again from experience, VEC staff have been proactive in managing risk within their schools and will already have procedures in place.

### Designing the risk management system

It is all too easy to forget that the main task of a risk management system is to provide a set of procedures to identify and manage risk. From long experience, many risk management systems are over-complicated for the organisation they serve, contain far too much jargon, are generic and contain ‘woolly’ procedures (known as control measures) such as “*all staff must be trained in all relevant safety matters*”. Furthermore they are often ineffective as the organisational structure, technical expertise, goodwill or finance is not available to fully implement the effective management of risks.

VECs are characterised by county-wide, multi-site, multi-function locations with an organisational centre. As such **the requirement of a risk management system must contain the following procedures:**

- The school identifies and manages its own risks as far it can
- Those risks it cannot manage are itemised and forwarded to the VEC
- The VEC monitors the assessment and management of risk in schools
- The VEC establishes a corporate level risk management committee
- The VEC compiles a list of all works or items required (risk register)
- The VEC manages this risk register as finances and resources permit
- The VEC ensures its committee is involved in the management of the risk register

### Assigning roles and responsibilities

At school level, there will be a need to create certain roles to assist in the identification and management of risk. Two main roles need to be created – that of Safety Officer and of Fire Officer. The titles are not important but the roles are. Depending on the size of the school, one person may assume both roles. The Principal may assume such roles but due to work pressures it is likely that a member of staff other than the Principal will assume one or both roles.

The school will then have to form a Safety Committee which will meet to discuss all risk related issues. It is suggested that the Principal chair this committee as he/she would chair other school committees. The School Safety or Fire Officer will have a number of duties including the identification of hazards within the premises and bringing this to the attention of the Principal or school safety committee.

At corporate level one specific role is required; that of the VEC Safety Officer. This should normally be the CEO. Additional responsibilities are needed for the HR and Buildings' Manager role. In terms of HR, an individual needs to be assigned to collate all school safety committee minutes to be forwarded to the CEO. This person would also identify and schedule risk related training requirements for VEC staff.

The person responsible for buildings would be responsible for the compilation of the risk register. This listing will be extensive as it would include all building-related items that require improvement or management. It will easily run to over 200 variables including disrepair, CCTV provision, asbestos reports, electrical safety, fire detection, emergency lighting, radon levels, chemical storage, intruder alarm, fire certification, food storage facilities, etc.

### Issues arising during the implementation of a risk management system

**Competency in risk assessment:** The assessment of risk is a technical issue. There comes a point where a non-trained individual will not have the skills to identify and manage the risks presented by an organisation. In many VECs a staff member will have been given the safety officer or fire officer role without the level of training that is required for competency at this level.

A typical VEC school building can contain facilities providing woodwork, metalwork, construction, food production, hairdressing, chemical storage, artwork, gymnasiums, indoor sports, concerts, plays, evening and weekend groups, outdoor facilities, and adventure tours. The building itself will also present risks dependant on its age, repair and occupants; it may also be shared with other community groups, or leased.

It is easy to see how VECs could present with a wide range of hazards under the classification of chemical, physical, biological and human factor risks. A competent assessor will recognise this and call for additional technical expertise where necessary. Areas that commonly require specific expertise will include electrical safety, machinery safety, the identification of asbestos-containing materials, fire engineering, food hygiene, energy management and chemical safety.

Many VECs have introduced consultants to provide specific risk advice. However the cost of accessing competent technical advice is, in many cases prohibitive, given school budgets. Also risk management is a relatively new discipline and the quality of risk assessments produced by safety consultants varies.

### The need for risk management procedures to be clear and implementable:

Unless staff within VECs receive adequate training with clear and implementable procedures, there will be confusion and understandable hesitation. For example, the way a risk assessment is actually carried out and recorded at school level is subject to interpretation.

**External regulation:** VECs have not received the level of external regulation experienced in sectors such as construction, manufacturing or transport. Without

this regulatory stimulus, many VECs will use buildings or have developed work practices that are now unacceptable to regulators. This situation may or may not be known by the VEC but any involvement with the regulator will lead to changes being required. Depending on the building condition or work practice, many VECs will not be in a position to quickly respond to regulator requirements.

**Compliance and persuasion:** Most categories of risk are legally required to be identified and managed such as health and safety fire safety and food safety. However environmental initiatives and good business risk practice are not generally mandatory for VECs. Even so, environmental initiatives will often find far greater acceptance given the existing goodwill of staff, students and parents towards this issue. Similarly business risk management makes good sense and is relatively easy to implement.

**Resources:** No discussion on risk management can take place without considering available resources. Any successful implementation of risk management will require finance, time, effort and goodwill. All VECs are aware of the scarcity of resources at the moment and this will remain the case for the foreseeable future.

However the human and financial cost of accidents and ill-health is well established and a lack of resources cannot be used as an excuse for inadequate risk management. Regulation is becoming more onerous and current developments in health and safety law now include the provision to prosecute individual staff as well as organisations for risk management failings.

This article is intended to introduce the concept of risk management. A further article will be produced detailing the experiences of one VEC that has begun the implementation of a specifically designed risk management system covering health and safety, fire safety, food safety, environmental management and business risk.

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## Growth in long term unemployment calls for new approach to apprenticeship

The June Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) highlights worrying growth in the number of long-term unemployed, up from 2.6% of the workforce in 2009 to 5.9%. In total, 43% (127,000) of our unemployed are out of work for more than a year. Long-term unemployment is hitting males more than females, 97,000 to 30,000 for all age groups, and 17,000 to 7,000 for those under 24.

As the skill-set for almost every job rises inexorably, many of our long-term unemployed may be unemployable without skills relevant to tomorrow's workplace. Yet, for tens of thousands of young people, there are no suitable training programmes to give them employability.

While we rightly continue to train architects, engineers and lawyers, though there is little current demand for such qualifications, the door to many seeking to enter apprenticeships, traineeships and VEC programmes to equip them for careers below the level of third level graduate are firmly bolted.

When our economy takes off, there will be jobs for all with appropriate skills but those without will remain confined to the sideline. Failing to upskill this cohort will also result in a shortage of the skills required to fuel economic takeoff.

Those who think it makes economic sense to leave our young unemployed in cold storage should think again: many of the social problems blighting Ireland today have their origins in earlier recessions and the magnitude of the current recession is such that its potential legacy is too frightening to imagine.

We need an urgent rethink about how best to give employability and hope to our young unemployed and the *2010 OECD Review of Vocational Education and Training (VET)* in Ireland and best practice in countries such as Norway and Germany point the way to what might be done.

The *OECD Review* highlighted a range of issues – the need to review the current apprenticeship system, the extent to which workplace training is underutilised and the importance of retaining young people in education and training.

Promoting the smart economy is laudable,

but this, on its own, is insufficient. As the EU Commission has acknowledged, some 50% of jobs in the EU in 2020 will depend on medium-level qualifications of the type provided by VET.

Ireland has the educational architecture in place (National Skills Strategy, National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), National Qualifications Authority, etc.) but lacks a coherent plan to provide our low-skilled young with real opportunities for improving their qualifications in readiness for the inevitable economic upturn.

The elements of the plan are all available, we simply need joined-up-thinking and real collaboration between education and training providers, government departments and agencies, the business world and the trade unions to deliver cost-effective, learner-centred programmes to enable our, low-skilled, young unemployed to catch the next economic wave as it comes on shore.

IVEA has proposed a framework for doing just that – a proposal reflecting the reality that many of our young low-skilled find it difficult to achieve in what may be termed 'academic' subjects yet have an innate capacity for hands-on learning.

In brief, the proposal involves the establishment of a **national traineeship programme** to provide full-award qualifications and workplace-relevant skills at Levels 4, 5 or 6, as may be appropriate, on the NFQ, through a combination of workplace learning (substantial work placement in both the private and public sector) and learning through 'hands-on' courses offered in VEC schools throughout the country, using their construction, engineering, ICT, art and design, science and computer-aided technical drawing laboratories and workshops, at times when these facilities are not being used by the schools.

The IVEA proposal envisages that trainees would be able to specialise in different work areas – clerical-administration, hospitality, environmental management, healthcare, green-technology, engineering, information technology, agriculture/horticulture, retail, distribution, sport and recreation, technical and laboratory work, etc., and that the qualifications acquired could, depending on

levels, provide access to third level education, a reformed apprenticeship system and/or semi-skilled employment.

Much of what is currently being provided to such young people does not combine to form whole awards, other than by chance. Therefore, IVEA proposes that every element of the training, including the work placement, would be certified in a way that enables full awards (single steps on the National Framework of Qualifications ladder) to be achieved in reasonable periods of time and allows the trainees to observe their own progress.

Currently, the range of Irish apprenticeships and traineeships is very limited and access to many of these has been curtailed by the economic downturn. Here we can learn from the Norwegians and the Germans, both of which offer apprenticeships right across the employment spectrum – an approach that bestows a status and a quality standard on work that, in Ireland, may be considered inferior.

IVEA's proposal would require business and the unions to cooperate with the educational providers for the work placement (internship) element of the programme to work effectively. Here, again, Ireland can learn from the Germans, where a majority of workforce entrants, without tertiary education, enter through one of 360 apprenticeships.

While, in Ireland, vocational education and training (VET) is the responsibility of the State and the providers, in Germany, the government has established a clear statutory framework for the provision of VET but leaves it to business and the unions, in consultation with the education system (vocational schools), to get on with designing and providing the programmes. Consequently, the newly qualified 'craftsperson' is work-ready from day one in employment.

The time for action is long overdue. 41% of 15 to 19 year olds and 26% of 20 to 24 year olds are unemployed, while there are 68,000 under 24 unemployed and 162,000 under 34 unemployed - with those with the lowest qualifications more likely to be unemployed. 175,000 of the unemployed hold only higher secondary or lower qualifications. Could the picture be starker?

## EYE ON EUROPE

# Youth on the Move – a new European Commission Initiative

Source: <http://europa.eu/youthonthemove/>

## Introduction

The European Commission has launched a new initiative called “*Youth on the Move*”, aimed at supporting learning and job mobility for young people in an era of significant youth unemployment. It is intended to encourage students to gain international experience and thus enhance their prospects of employment.

## What is Youth on the Move?

The *Youth on the Move* communication sets out a series of actions to help young people gain the qualifications and skills they need to succeed in the jobs market. The measures proposed are:

- Modernising education and training so that it is more relevant to the needs of young people and employers. Actions will target schools, apprentices and better recognition for skills gained outside formal education. They also aim to make higher education more attractive
- Supporting learning and job mobility. Measures include new EU-level information sources, a Council Recommendation on removing obstacles to learning mobility, a new generation of EU funding programmes for education and training, and an improved European job portal (EURES).
- Providing a new EU framework for youth employment, including recommendations to Member States on labour market reform and more help for public employment services to improve support for young people.

## Why is the EU launching a specific initiative for young people?

Europe's future prosperity depends on its young people; these represent a fifth of the EU population. The crisis has led to dramatic increase in youth unemployment. Access to the job market is tough, even for those with good qualifications. These challenges call for co-ordinated action at EU level, to improve the quality of education and training so that young people are better equipped for the labour market. Some *Youth on the Move* actions will start very soon. Others involve a longer-term perspective.

## How does Youth on the Move differ from what the EU has done up until now?

Although existing EU programmes in education and training overwhelmingly target young people (95% of funding under the Lifelong Learning Programme goes to young people, teachers and trainers), this is the first single EU-level strategy embracing both education and employment.

## What can the EU do to stop young people dropping out of school early?

Although EU Member States have primary responsibility for policy choices and funding decisions in education and training, the EU plays an important supporting role. The EU has, for instance, raised awareness of the impact of early school leaving on the European economy and proposed common targets to address the problem. In 2011, the European Commission will propose a Council Recommendation for a detailed pan-European strategy to tackle early school leaving.

## How can Youth on the Move contribute to meeting the EU target for 40% of young people to complete higher education or equivalent?

Ireland's education statistics: The percentage of the Irish labour force with higher education qualifications currently stands at 39% (33% in 2005) and the Government target is to raise that percentage to 48% by 2020. Similarly, the current percentage of the labour force holding a Leaving Certificate is 40%, and the Government target is 45% by 2020.

Raising the number of young people in higher education or equivalent and ensuring more students graduate calls for action at different levels. One part of the answer is to improve the quality and relevance of primary and secondary education and to ensure that pupils receive the right guidance on higher education options.

## Why is vocational education and training (VET) important?

Vocational education and training is chosen by an average of around 50% of all students in upper secondary education in the EU. The sector needs to be modernised to increase its attractiveness and quality. Current projections suggest that around 50% of jobs in the EU in 2020 will depend on medium-level qualifications of the type provided by vocational education and training.

## What does the EU mean by ‘mobility’?

‘Mobility’ means moving to another country to study, train or work. Youth on the Move makes a distinction between:

- Learning mobility – studying or training abroad to gain new skills and experience.
- Employment mobility – moving abroad for work, on a short or longer-term basis.

The European Commission has a long history of providing financial support for learning mobility through programmes such as *Erasmus* and *Leonardo da Vinci* in vocational education.

## Why does the EU think spending time studying, training or getting work experience abroad is useful for young people?

In a European Single Market, the availability of highly qualified individuals with experience of living in different Member States is vital for smart and sustainable growth. Experience gained in another country allows people to improve their language skills and develop other capacities, such as dealing with other cultures.

## Does youth mobility enhance a person's job prospects?

Yes it does, according to independent studies. More than 40% of the employers attach importance to the experience gained from study and work abroad and consider that internationally experienced graduates are likely to take up jobs with high professional responsibilities. This is the key finding of a 2006 study on the professional value of the *Erasmus scheme* by the International Centre for Higher Education Research and the University of Kassel, Germany.

## Why is the Commission focusing on youth unemployment, given that unemployment has increased among the whole workforce?

Young people under 25 are one of the groups in the workforce that has been most affected by the crisis. At present, 5.2 million young people in the EU are unemployed – that is one in five of all young people in the labour market.

#### How will the EU address youth employment in practice?

Putting policies and measures in place to tackle youth unemployment is first and foremost a national responsibility, but all Member States face common challenges.

There will also be new money available for two actions directly accessible to young people:

- Starting next year will be a new pilot action, “Your first EURES job”, to help young people seize the opportunities in the wider EU labour market, and to help companies finding qualified workers.
- The new “European Progress Microfinance facility” will make it easier for young entrepreneurs to access credit.

#### What can EURES do for young people today?

Helping to match people with jobs is an essential part of the role played by EURES – the European employment service, which brings together job services across the EU. It provides information, advice and help in finding a job in 27 EU countries, plus Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Switzerland. EURES also has a network of more than 850 specialised advisers who can offer personalised help and advice on the practical, legal and administrative aspects of moving between countries.

The EURES portal ([www.eures.europa.eu](http://www.eures.europa.eu)) offers a database with half a million job vacancies.

In the past three years, the number of vacancies on the EURES portal has grown by 18%, the number of employee CVs by 12%, and - most importantly - the number of employers by 129%.

#### What does *Youth on the Move* do against the precarious employment of young people?

Young people often face job insecurity and can become trapped in a series of temporary contracts. The Commission therefore recommends that Member States with such employment rules introduce an open-ended “single” contract with a gradual increase in employee protection rights, to make it more attractive for employers to hire young people.

#### Why does the Commission want to define the quality of traineeships?

Traineeships are very useful for young people to get a first foothold in the labour market, and employers value candidates who have gained work experience in a traineeship.

As national legislation and practice on traineeships vary in the 27 EU Member States, the Commission will also make information available on the different regulations so as to increase transparency for young people considering a traineeship abroad.

#### Where can I find more information?

You can visit the *Youth on the Move* website – <http://europa.eu/youthonthemove/>

## Second Language Teaching and Learning – 21st Century Style

By Ms Joanna Norton, CEO & Founder, Click4ESOL

Integration is a chaotic process. A foreign national's capacity for social and economic interaction with persons whose ethnic or national origins are different to theirs, or their actual interaction with them, is difficult to quantify. The migration of people to live, work and study in countries throughout the developed world has been uneven. Numerous push and pull factors have resulted in immigration policies that have acted to discourage the creation of multi-cultural societies. Indeed, some national governments have a long track record in ensuring migrants are admitted entry on a temporary only basis, and that full citizenship, and therefore full integration is not part of the package. Germany is a case in point.

Nevertheless, the end result has been a diverse Europe, with ethnicities, cultures and traditions living side by side. Within education, this mass movement of people has produced super-diverse classrooms, where teachers are often ill-equipped to deal with their learners' needs, learning resources are inept, and learning outcomes for a growing number of students, dire.

As an ESOL teacher, with a wealth of experience of teaching in super-diverse classrooms, I grew incredibly frustrated by the low achievement and progression rates of our second language speakers. The lack of homogeneity amongst ESOL learners undoubtedly makes the teaching and learning process a difficult one. For many immigrants to Ireland, and to other EU countries, life here is a new start. Yet we often fail to impart this aspirational message.

As a teacher, teacher trainer, materials writer, content developer and now entrepreneur, I have long questioned our educational system's ability to produce 21st century workers, who can effectively compete with their peers in China, Pakistan and Brazil. One in six young people in Ireland, leave school without any qualifications. The numbers are even higher at junior level. These problems are compounded by the presence of some second language speakers, who cannot yet achieve the required standards. Yet the developing world is full of young people with an insatiable desire to learn. I believe digital learning content that is global in nature, designed to cater for a variety of learning styles, and that mimics the way young people interact outside of the classroom, is one solution. Indeed, digital learning can also assist adult learners by providing them with learning content, in a manner that fits into their day.

At Click4ESOL, we travel to countries our migrants are from to ensure our content is inclusive. We work with professional graphic designers, photographers, musicians and developers to produce 21st learning resources that give learners a model to aspire to. Click4ESOL is striving to enable people to live, work and integrate within an English speaking community. To achieve this, we need to engage with collaborative learning, so that everyone can achieve their full potential. Technology to achieve this goal is available, it is up to all those involved in the teaching and learning process, whether we use it.



## Co. Louth VEC initiates School Self-Evaluation Processes

During the 2010/2011 school year Co. Louth VEC is engaging in self-evaluation processes in each of its five schools and institutes. Driving this development is a belief that self-evaluation is one of the most effective improvement mechanisms for individuals, groups or organisations. It facilitates staff to critically examine teaching and learning as members of professional teams rather than individual teachers working in isolation. It promotes self-evaluation as a process of continuing development rather than a once off event. Research has found that collaborative continuous professional development (CPD) produces improvements in learning and teaching. Self-evaluation processes involving CDP sustained over a period of time produces specific benefits in teachers' attitudes and beliefs, teaching strategies, pupils' attitudes and behaviour and pupil achievement.

The approach adopted in Co. Louth VEC is to provide a series of facilitated sessions with subject departments throughout the school year. The first session will involve an examination of the purpose of subject department and will then explore best practice in relation to key aspects of teaching and learning such as preparation, assessment, teaching methodology, homework and questioning. Teachers then complete an anonymous self-evaluation questionnaire in relation to all key aspects of the teaching process.

The overall results are collated and fed back to the department. Based on this exercise, department staff select areas of teaching that they would like to improve on as a team. They then receive training in a selected area/s before trying out new instructional approaches. Two follow up sessions are provided to support staff through the process. These allow staff to talk about and evaluate their own progress, hear about the progress of colleagues and also provide ongoing training and guidance for staff particularly in relation to any difficulties or challenges that arise in the implementation of new approaches.

In addition to the work with subject departments, another VEC school is planning to evaluate the effectiveness of its bullying policy which will be followed by further training and the redevelopment of the policy. In a PLC college staff have engaged in self-evaluation in order to maximise the learning outcomes and to improve retention. The process began with a detailed examination of the levels of retention and the certification outcomes for learners. Staff also examined the reasons why learners dropped out of courses before completion. The examination of relevant data is assisting the staff team to redevelop its approach to student retention and the achievement of outcomes for learners.

## Co. Cavan VEC's – "Get Connected" Project

Since 2006, Co. Cavan VEC has been successfully implementing its Education Plan 2006-10. In 2010, the "Get Connected" Project was implemented by Cavan VEC. This project was aimed at using technology to enhance both internal and external organisational communications. *"The review and enhancement of organisational communication was identified as a priority in our Education Plan 2006-10. Addressing the challenges presented by the geographically dispersed nature of the VEC was central to the solution sought. In addition, in March of this year we launched our 'Five-year ICT Strategy for Co. Cavan VEC' and central to it was addressing how IT could be used to enhance organisational communications"* stated Mr Colm McEvoy, CEO.

Following a lengthy review of organisation communications and investment in its IT systems architecture, the VEC decided to deploy a VOIP technology-based solution. Co. Cavan VEC recognised the potential of the effective deployment of such technology to augment communication channels within a geographically dispersed organisation. In essence, it provides a very effective and efficient solution for connecting VEC centres/schools etc. using video conference technology, allowing all schools/centres within the scheme etc. to communicate with each other in real time from their desktops. *"The traditional method of people meeting centrally is being replaced with a model whereby senior management meetings within the Scheme can take place without staff needing to leave their centres. This type of approach presents opportunities at all levels within the organisation to enhance*



*Ms Ann Marie Lacey, Director, Cavan Institute, using the new system to communicate with Ms Karen Fitzpatrick, Principal, Virginia College.*



*CEO, Colm McEvoy, highlights the features of Cavan VEC's "Get Connected" Project to Minister Brendan Smith, Senator Joe O'Reilly, Senator Diarmuid Wilson, Cllr Madeline Argue, Co. Cavan VEC Chairperson, Cllr Shane P O'Reilly Co. Cavan VEC Vice-Chairperson, Ms Karen Fitzpatrick, Principal, Virginia College and John McCabe.*

*communications. Since its introduction, feedback in terms of its use and effectiveness has been very positive"* stated the CEO.

Ms Ann Marie Lacey, Director, Cavan Institute, has fully embraced this new technology. *"The utilisation of this technology has proven very useful in terms of managing Cavan Institute's multi-centre campus. Providing for effective communications can be challenging, but the deployment of this technology has revolutionised our approach"* states Ms Lacey.

Another noteworthy development has been the introduction of vodcasting ([www.cavanvec.ie](http://www.cavanvec.ie)). Essentially this development involves the use of short video clips, accessed through the VEC web portal to communicate directly with staff. As Colm states: *"this is a very simple use of the technology to communicate directly with staff. I suppose in many ways it is an alternative to a newsletter. It provides a very effective channel of communication within the organisation. Indeed, some of our schools have started to use it to communicate directly with parents and students"*.

## Mary B to co-pilot as IVEA Vice-president

After eight years at the helm as President of IVEA, Cllr Mary Bohan handed over the chain of office to incoming President, Cllr Noel O'Connor, at the conclusion of Congress 2010 in Killenard, Co Laois, in September. However, this is not a farewell for Mary as she remains as one of the two IVEA Vice-presidents, so her guiding influence will remain with us for some time yet.

Mary has steered the development of IVEA with admirable skill during her term as President which saw major reform of the IVEA structures and various amendments to its constitution. During her time also, Mary oversaw the advancement of significant new



*Outgoing IVEA President,  
Cllr Mary Bohan*

developments in the organisation including the IVEA headquarters relocation project due to come to fruition in 2011.

Mary was particularly well regarded within the VEC sector not only as a serving member and chairperson of Co. Leitrim VEC but by IVEA Standing Council members and throughout the vocational and wider education sector. Mary developed positive working relationships with colleague organisations throughout the sector and was respected for her straight talking ability mixed with a common sense approach and endeavouring good humour. Mary will no doubt prove a valued support to incoming President Noel O'Connor particularly at this time of significant challenge facing the vocational education sector.

### UPCOMING EVENTS

## National Administrative Staff Seminar 2010

Dates: Tuesday, 23rd November and Wednesday, 24th November 2010  
Venue: Kilashee House Hotel, Naas, Co. Kildare

**This year sees a change to the traditional approach to administrative staff seminars run by IVEA.** In view of the absence of a staff seminar earlier this year and having reviewed the cost-effectiveness of two seminars running in the year, IVEA has altered the format for this year so that the seminar will be open to all grades. The agenda will run over Tuesday and Wednesday and recognising the constraints on staff in VECs in terms of time, IVEA has sought to compress the agenda very tightly to maximise time and output for delegates. A variety of topics will be considered in the context of presentations and forum debates. The agenda will include such matters as:

- The recently announced aggregation of VECs
- TPS
- Procurement

- Separate sessions on the State's IR machinery and the LRC Workplace Mediation Service
- Data Protection responsibilities for VECs and
- Employer obligations – facilitated by NERA

In working with administrative staff in VECs throughout the years, IVEA acknowledges the commitment and support provided by administrative staff throughout the sector – both serving and retired. We very much hope that with the concerns that currently prevail in our sector and in the wider national public sector climate, that this year's administrative seminar will be well supported and prove a worthwhile opportunity for staff to get together and to share experience, upskill and network. In this regard, the support of all VECs is, as always, very much appreciated.



*Mr Sean Ashe CEO, President, CEEOA congratulates Ms Patricia O'Brien in her new role as NAPD President*

## IVEA CONGRESS 2011

is confirmed for The Radisson Blu Hotel & Spa,  
Little Island, Cork,  
for Wednesday 14th and  
Thursday, 15th September 2011.

***IVEA Secretariat wishes you and  
your families a very peaceful  
Christmas and New Year.***