

www.ivea.ie

Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA)
An Cumann Gairmoideachais in Éirinn
Piper's Hill
Kilcullen Road
Naas, Co Kildare
Ireland

Tel.: +353 (0)45 901 070
Fax.: +353 (0)45 901 711
Email: info@ivea.ie

IVEA

Representing Vocational
Education Committees

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NEWS

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Education Committees

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IVEA Administration and Training Centre

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Year of change and transformation

2011 will certainly be marked in the history books as a year of immense structural and transformational change in the vocational education sector. The transformation process is being underpinned legislatively by two separate Bills, the Education and Training Boards Bill 2011 and a second Bill yet to be drafted which will provide for the dissolution of FÁS and establishes SOLAS as a body corporate. Both bills will profoundly change the structure and profile of the vocational education sector. VECs are to be transformed into ETBs with an expanded brief to deliver education and training programmes in a new further education and training sector.

The heads of the Education and Training Boards Bill have already been published and will be considered in the first instance by the Oireachtas Select Sub-Committee on Education and Skills. Minister Quinn has also announced the headquarters locations of the new Education and Training Boards but not without some controversy. IVEA Standing Council has considered the Bill and has submitted some amending proposals to the Oireachtas Committee which met with IVEA, CEEOA and AEOA on 22 November. The Bill envisages an expanded role for the ETBs to include the provision of assistance and support to other education and training providers and this was welcomed by IVEA.

The 2011 Bill changes little of substance other than what was expected in regard to the replacement of existing VECs with ETBs and the creation of a mechanism through which amalgamations can take place.

The ETBs are not unlike the regional education boards which were proposed in the 1997 ill-fated Bill which sought to establish REBs as a middle tier within the education system.

IVEA was disappointed, however, that the proposed size of the Board of the ETB was much smaller than anticipated and certainly does not comprehend the need for real community voice and representation in much larger geographical entities represented by the ETBs. This flaw could weaken or even disconnect the ETB from the community and therefore profoundly alters a key aspect of the ethos of these educational and training authorities. While some would argue that the greater engagement with jobseekers will deepen the ETBs relevance in local communities the community voice at Board level will be much less that was the case in VECs.

IVEA has submitted a number of amendments to the Oireachtas Education and Skills Sub-Committee providing for, inter-alia, enhanced membership of the new ETBs.

The establishment of a distinct pillar of further education and training under SOLAS and the proposed statutorily defined roles of ETBs in the proposed Bill to establish SOLAS will enhance ETBs as statutory education and training providers. SOLAS will head up a new further education and training sector for which it will be the funding agency providing strategic oversight and direction. The ETBs will be delivering the education and training programmes at local level and where that is not possible then other providers will be engaged.

IVEA has argued that the local statutory authority should be accountable for the entirety of delivery at local level. If it cannot deliver from within its own resources it can contract approved private or other providers from a panel pre-approved by SOLAS. As the authority with a defined geographical remit the ETB is the only body capable of overseeing and reporting on delivery at regional level and be accountable to SOLAS for that. Likewise the ETB with full statutory responsibility and accountability for delivery can provide feedback and statistical data to SOLAS in support of ongoing and future strategic planning.

Some are wedded to the idea of competition between ETBs and private providers IVEA believes this approach will lead to lack of cohesion and duplication in provision at local level in a “free for all” where there is no overarching local responsibility for ensuring that programmes are delivered in a strategically focused manner across the ETB catchment area.

As we can see there is very significant and fundamental structural reform to take place over the next while. The scale of this reform presents very serious challenges as both the aggregation of VECs into ETBs and the establishment of a distinct further education sector will likely occur within similar timeframes. In two years' time perhaps the vocational education sector will be radically reformed, restructured and re-orientated to face the challenges of an era of international competition on the basis of skills levels and efficiencies. In that scenario the ETBs can become the country's secret weapon in addressing this challenge.

Congress 2011

what they said

Current predicament presents opportunities

The President of the Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA), Cllr Noel O'Connor, in his address to the 107th Annual Congress of the IVEA in Cork, argued that notwithstanding our straitened circumstances, there is much we can do to ensure our collective futures but this will entail reforming 'the way we do things' in education and training and reprioritising government expenditure to ensure that education, which 'has a central role to play in Ireland regaining its economic sovereignty' is adequately resourced. 'We can cut our spending and mollify the Troika today but we do this at the expense of our individual and collective futures', said Mr O'Connor.

According to Noel O'Connor

Future offers hope and opportunity for VECs....

The reconfiguration of VECs presents us with the opportunity to provide individuals and communities, for the first time, with an integrated, coherent and quality assured further education and training service – a service that can enable people to move their lives from where they are to where they wish to be by climbing an accessible qualifications ladder.'

Sins of one generation must not blight life chances of future generations....

Future prosperity depends on the extent to which we have a well-educated, dynamic, critical thinking, innovative and flexible workforce and without additional investment in education and training, we can have little hope of realising this objective'.

Indiscriminate application of moratorium on staffing damaging education and training services....

Central to VECs current difficulties 'is the indiscriminate application of the moratorium on filling a large number of education posts and the application of employment control frameworks, ceilings and thresholds.'

Increased PTR will restrict subject choice & erode supports to vulnerable...

'At second level, the effect of an increased PTR would be not just one more student in each class but a reduction in the capacity of schools to meet the curricular needs of their students and this often means that schools are forced to drop the very subjects critical to economic recovery – physics, chemistry, higher level maths and foreign languages.'



Forum on primary patronage – a brave and timely intervention....

The 'intention of those who established our national school system, in 1831, should now be realised and ... schools should cater for children of all beliefs, with religious instruction being provided in accordance with parents' wishes. We have had enough division on this Island and in reimagining our primary school system we should ensure that community cohesion is a key consideration'.

Pluralism not compromised by inclusion of optional religious education....

"The requirement that all aspects of religious education take place outside of the school day is overly restrictive. It also raises a very fundamental question as to why 'religious' parents would be identified as the one group that cannot have their children educated in the way that they wish".

'Parental choice is not necessarily about choosing between denominational and non- denominational patronage. A State patronage, through an agent such as a VEC, can deliver primary education that meets the needs of all families.'

"The solution ... is not to privatise further primary education by transferring the patronage of denominational schools to private patrons that reflect the current zeitgeist. Zeitgeists change and we risk being left, in the future, with another 'patronage' problem."

All families must have access to local primary school – as of right....

All students should have their belief system respected and supported by the schools they attend.'

Community national schools cherish all children equally....

Community National Schools 'have an ethos of inclusiveness and respect for all beliefs, both religious and non-religious' and are 'ideally suited to cherishing all children in a community equally'.

Reform of enrolment process must simplify matters for all....

Reform of school enrolment process must 'simplify matters for all involved (boards of management, VECs, school principals, students and parents) with all ... regulations governing enrolment being consolidated into a single, well laid out, easily understandable ... and easily accessible document.'

Noncompliance must attract a real and inevitable penalty....

Reform must ensure that schools that 'directly or indirectly avoid enrolling students on an inclusive basis' attract 'a real and inevitable penalty'.

School cooperation crucial to reforming enrolment....

'Inter-school cooperation on enrolment matters is critical to facilitating inclusive enrolment without parents ... having to resort to time-consuming and emotionally exhausting disputes and appeals.'

'The over-riding concern of the IVEA is to bring an end to the discriminatory enrolment practices that have blighted the aspirations of many and concomitantly fostered unnecessary social divisions within Irish communities.'

Reform of second level education....

IVEA acknowledges urgent need for reform of second level education. However

'The 'invisible hand of the Leaving Certificate & Points Race influences every aspect of junior cycle education' so 'reform process must commence with the points race and senior cycle; otherwise it will fail.'

'Successful reform will 'require a clear and understandable vision of what we want to achieve, thorough planning and clear agreement with all stakeholders ... Otherwise, we risk failure.'

Embarking on a reform programme that we may not be able to resource would also risk failure.'

Reform of second level must harness full power of ICT....

'Appropriately applied, ICT, more than anything else, can transform every aspect of education and training for the better' – 'move us away from a preoccupation with knowledge acquisition and help us develop critical thinking, creative, enterprise and lifelong learning skills, ensure that school leavers are comfortable with and competent in the technology of the age and ensure sufficient numbers take up further studies in computing and technology' and 'deliver greater professional satisfaction for teachers'.

'If we want schools to deliver different and better outcomes, we must give them the tools to do the job. Cost is not the issue here; it is more a matter of joined up thinking.'

'Critical to this ... is the provision of a 100mb/s broadband service to all schools.'

'Minister Rabbitte's offer to provide 100mb/s service to schools must be accepted by DES.'

'Investment in appropriate ICT in schools can save us money' – 'with e-books we could solve our school textbook problem ... could we require all text book publishers to publish an e-version of all texts – as is done in California?'

Establishment of SOLAS and integration of further education and training welcome and timely....

The government's decision is 'probably the most innovative development in decades to impact on the vocational education sector.'



Pictured above are some members of the Board of FÁS (soon to be SOLAS), including IVEA General Secretary Michael Moriarty, who recently held their board meeting at IVEA Headquarters.

Minister Quinn's address at Congress 2011

In his address to Congress 2011 Minister Quinn argued that:

- ▶ The priority task for Government is to regain our economic sovereignty. At present we depend on the EU/IMF programme to fund our public services and to sustain our banking system.
- ▶ Social Protection, Health and Education are the largest areas of expenditure and cuts in those areas are unavoidable.
- ▶ We have a specific further challenge in relation to the education budget. I will have less money in but will at the same time have to provide for increased numbers in our schools and colleges.
- ▶ Cutting the resources available across the various schemes and programmes operated by my Department is not a space any of us want to be in.

VEC Rationalisation

- ▶ This new VEC structure, allied to changes to the structures for delivery of education and training, comprises an overall road map. This will bring about an exciting future for the sector and a future in which you will have an enhanced role in delivering both education and training.
- ▶ Where redeployment of all of the headquarter staff in an entity to one location is not possible, I am giving consideration to having sub-offices in some locations, at least for the medium term.
- ▶ Within a matter of weeks I hope to have approval for the publication of the General Scheme of an Education and Training Boards Bill. This Bill reflects the enhanced role future role of the Sector.
- ▶ It is a substantial piece of draft legislation. While fundamentally it will provide for the legal establishment of the new Education and Training Boards it will also set out the functions of those boards, the much wider remit that you de facto have had over time and will have in the future.
- ▶ Elements of the bill will facilitate the developments in relation to SOLAS.
- ▶ The earlier scrutiny of the Joint Committee should facilitate introduction of the bill early in 2012.



Minister for Education and Skills, Ruairí Quinn, TD

SOLAS

- ▶ Building on the transfer of responsibility for FÁS from my Department to the Department of Social Protection, this new authority will replace FÁS and will ensure the provision of 21st century high quality further education and training programmes.
- ▶ SOLAS will provide programmes that are responsive both to the needs of learners and job seekers as well as the wider needs of enterprise. We need "New Skills for New Jobs".
- ▶ We have to shift away from skills provision for traditional construction and manufacturing occupations, which have seen a huge fall in employment, and place a greater focus on training and education programmes which can prepare jobseekers and other learners for occupations in growth areas like the services, ICT, medical devices, food and biopharma sectors.
- ▶ The road ahead means letting go of programmes and courses and replacing them with new courses and new and flexible methods of delivery.
- ▶ As you return to your committees (soon to be Education and Training Boards) and in the weeks and months ahead my confident expectation is that when you interact with your schools and centres you will champion these changes and that you will be energised by the confidence the Government is placing in you.
- ▶ We live in most challenging times, but we are meeting challenges head on. Together we are streamlining a dynamic Education and Training Sector which will be positioned to deliver as much for ordinary people and for our country in the 21st century, and to deliver in a manner consistent with the noble tradition of delivery by VECs in past decades.



Opportunity to input into legislation to establish new Education and Training Boards

The Minister for Education and Skills, Ruairí Quinn T.D., announced recently that following approval of the Government he has referred the General Scheme (Heads of Bill) of an Education and Training Boards Bill to the Joint Committee on Jobs, Social Protection and Education.

Education and Training Boards (ETBs) will take over the work of the VECs and will have an expanded role in the delivery of further education and training across the country.

Announcing the move, Minister Quinn said, "This new Bill will consolidate the existing nine Vocational Education Acts and will reflect the enhanced future role of the Sector."

The Bill represents a consolidation of the 9 existing VEC Acts into one proposed Act which is expected to be passed into legislation in mid - 2012. Obsolete elements of previous Acts are deleted and new sections are added. It also provides for the legal establishment of the new ETBs, sets out the functions of the boards, taking account of the development of the sector over the years, and it facilitates further enhancement of the role of the sector into the future including its proposed role in relation to SOLAS.

Speaking on the referral of Bill to the Joint Committee, Minister Quinn said "This is a new way of doing business on legislation. This more open and democratic approach will give interested parties and stakeholders a much earlier opportunity to consider the proposed legislation and influence its final shape through engagement with my officials or through the work of the Committee," said the Minister.

IVEA General Secretary, Michael Moriarty welcomed the fact that Minister Quinn has referred the Bill to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Jobs, Social Protection and Education in the first instance "as this will afford an opportunity to debate the provisions of the Bill from the outset." He also highlighted ETBs' crucial role as new statutory local education authorities", implementing government policy and delivering education and training programmes in accordance with that policy."

Mr Moriarty concluded by saying "IVEA is disappointed, with the provisions that significantly reduce the size of the membership of the Board, compared with the size of the membership of the present committees of VECs. This proposal, if implemented, will result in the sundering of any meaningful links with the local communities. Overall however, IVEA welcomes the new consolidated legislation which can establish ETBs as a strong, vibrant middle tier structure in the Irish education system."

IVEA hosts conference of European Education Employers

IVEA recently hosted a major multi-lingual conference involving representatives of European education employers and European teacher trade unions. The conference, under the auspices of the European Federation of Education Employers (EFEE), of which IVEA is a member, was held on the 19th of October 2011 in the Shelbourne Hotel, Dublin. The conference took place in English, with simultaneous interpretation into French and German.



General Secretary of EFEE, Bianka Stege in conversation with Minister for Education and Skills, Ruairí Quinn, TD and IVEA General Secretary, Michael Moriarty.

The conference, titled 'Leadership and governance at schools: European approaches', marked the final stage of the EFEE project 'Leadership and governance in schools as instruments for improving student results and preparing them for lifelong learning'. The project was supported by the European Commission.

Schools of the 21st century face enormous challenges with rising demands from pupils, parents and teachers in our globalised world characterised by technological innovation. Effective leadership is therefore increasingly important, and as a result high on the political agenda of the European Union, as well as in most of the member states.

The aim of the EFEE conference was to present the findings of the project's comparative study of the different approaches to leadership and governance in schools in the different countries of the EU and in candidate countries, and to exchange views on the project's outcomes with the experts present. During the conference, delegates discussed the findings of the project in relation to the selection of school leaders, the training of school leaders and the performance management of schools, including governance. The discussions centred on such topics as: What were the main challenges? Who was accountable to whom for what? Who were the main stakeholders involved?

The aim of the Dublin conference was not to establish a single European model, but to present their project's trans-national findings, and to strengthen and expand on those findings through the input of the experts attending the conference. The conference results are now intended to form the basis of a follow-on project, which will focus on such issues as the development of school leaders, training opportunities for school leaders, the development of a performance assessment framework, among others. The overall aim, of course, is to contribute to the improvement of leadership in schools in Europe.

EU working group holds Peer Learning Activity in Piper's Hill

By Pat O'Mahony, IVEA Education Research Officer and member of EU Thematic Working Group on Teacher Professional Development



The Group at a visit to the Pontifical University of Maynooth

From 2 to 6 October, the European Commission's Thematic Working Group on 'Teacher Professional Development' held a Peer Learning Activity (PLA) at IVEA's new headquarters at Piper's Hill, in Naas. IVEA was hosting the conference on behalf of the European Federation of Education Employers – EFEE.

The PLA focussed on 'Policy approaches to defining and describing teacher competences'. In other words, it set out to develop some guidelines for the Commission around what countries seeking to establish a set of competences for teachers need to take into account.

Representatives from the following countries participated in the PLA – Norway, Scotland, Cyprus, Croatia, Austria, the Netherlands, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Sweden, Estonia, Belgium Spain and, of course, Ireland. Our foreign visitors stayed at the nearby Kilashee House Hotel and thoroughly enjoyed its historical ambience, its lovely rural setting and the quiet rural roads, which are ideal for walkers.

One evening, the group visited the Pontifical University of Maynooth where their guide, Dominic McNamara, gave them a wonderful tour of the college grounds and buildings – effortlessly and enthrallingly covering a millennium of history in a little over an hour.

Those involved in the PLA literally worked from dawn till dusk for the four days under the direction of Paul Holdsworth of the Directorate-General for Education and Culture at the European Commission.

At the beginning of the PLA some participants had reservations about the benefits of defining a set of competences for teachers as, in their view, teaching is about much more than the sum of a narrow set of competences and involves other dimensions, such as judgement and context, that are not amenable to being captured in a set of competences or standards. However, by the end of the PLA there was pretty much unanimity that a properly developed set of competences could add real value to the whole process of improving teaching and learning. In particular, a well-developed set of competences could provide a common language with which to define and discuss the work of schools and teachers. Furthermore, they could inform initial teacher education and continuous professional development and provide an agreed framework for assessing the work of schools and teachers in the context of continuously improving the quality of teaching and learning.

The whole teacher competences issue will be further advanced at another PLA in Warsaw (Poland) in late November and it is envisaged that, following the Warsaw PLA, a handbook will be developed for policy makers around the development and use of a set of teacher competences.

The work of the Thematic Working Group on teacher competences has its provenance in a number of relatively recent authoritative reports.

The European Commission (2007) noted that 'Teachers have a key role to play in preparing pupils to take their place in society and in the world of work' and therefore suggested that 'at every point in their career, teachers need to have, or be able to acquire, the full range of subject knowledge, attitudes and pedagogical skills to be able to help young people to reach their full potential'.

In 2005, the OECD asserted that '... countries need to have clear and concise statements of what teachers are expected to know and be able to do, and these teacher profiles need to be embedded throughout the school and teacher education systems. The profile of teacher competencies needs to derive from the objectives for student learning, and provide profession-wide standards and a shared understanding of what counts as accomplished teaching.

The teacher profiles need to encompass strong subject matter knowledge, pedagogical skills, the capacity to work effectively with a wide range of students and colleagues, to contribute to the school and the profession, and the capacity to continue developing. The profile could express different levels of performance appropriate to beginning teachers, experienced teachers, and those with higher responsibilities. A clear, well-structured and widely supported teacher profile can be a powerful mechanism for aligning the elements involved in developing teachers' knowledge and skills, and for providing a means of assessing whether teacher development programmes are making a difference.'

Ministers of Education, meeting in the Education Council, have on three occasions (European Union 2007, 2008, 2009) committed themselves to improving the whole continuum of Teacher Education by improving the recruitment and selection of teachers, raising the quality of their Initial Teacher Education, providing systematic support to beginning teachers, and improving the relevance and quality of career-long opportunities for continuing professional development'.

Concerning specifically the competences of teachers, Ministers have recognised that 'The knowledge, skills and commitment of teachers, as well as the quality of school leadership, are the most important factors in achieving high quality educational outcomes. ... For this reason, it is essential ... to ensure that those recruited to teaching and school leadership posts are of the highest calibre and well-suited to the tasks they have to fulfil'

The ministers went on to note that:

'no course of initial teacher education, however excellent, can equip teachers with all the competences they will require during their careers. Demands on the teaching profession are evolving rapidly, imposing the need for new approaches. To be fully effective in teaching, and capable of adjusting to the evolving needs of learners in a world of rapid social, cultural, economic and technological change, teachers themselves need to reflect on their own learning requirements in the context of their particular school environment, and to take greater responsibility for their own lifelong learning as a means of updating and developing their own knowledge and skills. ...'

and that:

'Great care and attention should ... be devoted to defining the required profile of prospective teachers and school leaders, to selecting them and preparing them to fulfil their tasks.'

Ministers have noted specifically the need to promote professional values and attitudes amongst teachers, including reflective practice, autonomous learning, engagement in research and innovation, collaboration with colleagues and parents and an involvement in the development of the whole school.

As regards competences, Ministers agree that, as a minimum, teachers should have a specialist knowledge of subjects, plus the necessary pedagogical skills to teach them, including to heterogeneous classes, making full use of ICT, whilst helping pupils to acquire transversal competences.

The question of teachers' competences can also be set in the wider context of the European Union's work to ensure that all citizens have the competences (knowledge, skills and attitudes) that they require. The European Parliament and the European Council in 2006 adopted a Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning which sets out the 8 competences deemed to be necessary for people to develop their potential and to play a full part in society and the economy. Logically, teachers also should master these competences.

Aine Lawlor, of the Irish Teaching Council outlined the work of the Council in relation to the competences required of the 21st century teacher and it was clear from the response of PLA participants that, thanks to the work of the Council, Ireland very much leads the field when it comes to re-imagining teacher education across the full teaching life cycle. Of course, we still have to implement the Council's policies and there is much that we can learn from our European colleagues about the implementation process.

The inputs and discussions at the PLA highlighted the extent to which most EU countries are going down the competences route to improving teaching and learning, though each is, as it were, coming at it from a slightly different perspective. In a sense, also, it can be said that each country has developed an aspect of best practice in the development and use of a set of teacher competences that has eluded others. PLAs, such as that held in Naas, have the potential to identify and disseminate best practice so that each country, in turn, does not have to 'reinvent the wheel'.

A full copy of the PLA report may be accessed at:
<http://bit.ly/ivea-naas-pla>

Oireachtas Select Committee welcomes consultation with Vocational Sector representatives

The Oireachtas Select Committee on Education was addressed by representatives of the vocational sector on the new Education and Training Bill and the proposed establishment of SOLAS and the Further Education Sector. Addressing the Committee on November 22 were Cllr Pat Kilbane, Fiona Hartley CEO, George O'Callaghan CEO, Geraldine Canning AEO, Mary Hamilton AEO and Michael Moriarty, General Secretary.

Following the initial presentations, the members of the Select Committee debated the proposals with the group. IVEA was satisfied that the exercise was most beneficial and that the sector was well represented.

Education and Training Board areas

Area	Education and Training Board
City of Cork and County Cork	Cork Education and Training Board
City of Dublin	City of Dublin Education and Training Board
City of Galway, County Galway and County Roscommon	Galway and Roscommon Education and Training Board
City of Limerick, County Limerick and County Clare	Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board
County Cavan and County Monaghan	Cavan and Monaghan Education and Training Board
County Donegal	Donegal Education and Training Board
County Dublin and Dun Laoghaire	Dublin and Dun Laoghaire Education and Training Board
County Kerry	Kerry Education and Training Board
County Kildare and County Wicklow	Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board
County Kilkenny and County Carlow	Kilkenny and Carlow Education and Training Board
County Laois and County Offaly	Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board
County Longford and County Westmeath	Longford and Westmeath Education and Training Board
County Louth and County Meath	Louth and Meath Education and Training Board
County Mayo, County Sligo and County Leitrim	Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim Education and Training Board
County Tipperary North Riding and County Tipperary South Riding	Tipperary Education and Training Board
City of Waterford, County Waterford and County Wexford	Waterford and Wexford Education and Training Board

New IVEA Headquarters



Assembled above are the IVEA Standing Council 2011-2012 outside the new IVEA Headquarters after their Mandatory Meeting on September 22.



New IVEA Headquarters, Piper's Hill



Lecture Theatre

Revised Merged VEC Authorities



What is Instructional Intelligence?



Introduction

A group of some 150 teachers from a range of vocational schools across the country marked a significant phase in their professional development at the Mount Wolseley Hotel in Tullow, Co. Carlow, in March of this year. These teachers, representing the first cohort of educators to complete a training programme in Instructional Intelligence with the renowned Canadian academic, Professor Barrie Bennett, received certificates to mark their graduation from IVEA President, Cllr. Noel O'Connor. They are now charged with facilitating workshops for teachers in their own schools and local areas so that the principles underpinning Instructional Intelligence can be disseminated to a wider audience. In wishing the graduates well in their future engagement with the project, Ms. Joan Russell, CEO of Co. Cork VEC and Chairperson of the National Steering Committee charged with directing the project, said that those involved in pioneering Instructional Intelligence in the classroom would be leading "a transformation in teaching and learning" in Ireland.

Professor Barrie Bennett

Professor Bennett has emerged as one of the world's leading proponents of Instructional Intelligence, having devoted much of his life to researching the ideas and principles that inform the theory as a whole. Professor Bennett has written and lectured extensively on the theme of teacher thinking/learning/action focused on instructional practices - how teachers acquire an instructional repertoire, how they extend it, integrate it, and what effects this practice has on student learning (pre-school to adult).

What is Instructional Intelligence?

So what is meant by the term "Instructional Intelligence"? In its literal sense, the notion relates to the extent to which teachers are "intelligent" about their instructional behaviour; or in other words, the manner in which teachers consciously or overtly modify their instructional actions so as to maximise the impact on student learning. More broadly, the theory may be defined as the conscious and deliberate utilisation by the teacher of a range of interventions or teacher actions categorised as skills, tactics and strategies that impact positively on student learning in the classroom, based on extensive research into how students learn.

Instructional Skills

Skills may be classified as those instructional actions that a teacher uses to enhance learning that are not, of themselves, complex or research-based, but serve to increase the chances that more complex instructional processes are successful. Asking questions is a skill that teachers engage in constantly. Yet research indicates that many teachers do not frame questions effectively. As Bennett argues, by choosing a respondent from a group of students who raise their hands to answer a question, the teacher can only be sure that the student who responded knew the answer, and cannot be as sure about those who did not raise a hand. A more effective approach is to ask students to think about a question before discussing it with a partner. Such an approach involves every student, thus heightening accountability, while also enabling them to rehearse an answer, thus increasing safety.

Instructional Tactics

Tactics are more powerful interventions than skills. A tactic may be defined as an action used to enrich or strengthen the application of a strategy. For example, the use of a Venn diagram might be thought of as traditionally the preserve of the Maths class. Yet, as a means of helping students to understand the similarities and differences between Hitler, Stalin and Mussolini in a History lesson, it can be a very effective visual device. Many different types of graphic organisers exist which can be applied to various subject areas and enable students to go beyond text or notes-based resources to learn effectively.

Instructional Strategies

Strategies represent the most powerful and complex teacher-led intervention in the classroom. While skills drive tactics, skills and tactics together drive strategies. Strategies are usually grounded in theory and research and involve a number of related steps. Examples include co-operative learning/ groupwork, concept attainment and team teaching.

Why investigate Instructional Intelligence?

Bennett argues that teachers need to move from being tacitly skilled in a limited number of instructional methods to being explicitly skilled in a higher number of instructional methods so as to increase learning and to facilitate teachers in differentiating their instruction to meet diverse students' diverse needs.

The future?

Professor Bennett has now commenced work with a second cohort of teachers who will, over the next two years, explore the ideas briefly outlined in this article and attempt to apply them in the classroom. For the first time, those schools participating include some from outside the vocational sector. The vocational sector can be justifiably proud of its role in spearheading this pioneering project. The formulation of a Steering Committee under the astute guidance of Joan Russell, who has done so much to give vision and leadership to the project to date, will help in providing a framework to support the foundations laid by Professor Bennett to date. The opportunity to extend that vision and achieve systemic change must not be missed. The mission of transforming teachers from a state of, to paraphrase Bennett, "accidental adequacy" to "conscious competency" is a worthy one. The vocational sector is well placed to continue on this mission.



Left to right: Cllr Noel O'Connor, President of IVEA, Dr Harold Hislop, Chief Inspector, Department of Education & Skills, Ms Joan Russell, CEO, Co. Cork VEC, Professor Barrie Bennett, University of Toronto, Mr Michael Moriarty, General Secretary of IVEA and Cllr Gerry Kelly, Chairman of Co. Cork VEC at the Instructional Intelligence training programme

The issues and challenges facing R.E. teachers in VEC schools

By Mary Duff, Religious Education (R.E.) teacher, Beaufort College, Navan, Co. Meath

Note: This article was originally presented at the John Marcus O'Sullivan Summer School 2011.



The following account is made up of the observations and reflections of one R.E. teacher working in a VEC school over the past eight years. While by no means an academic study these personal observations and reflections raise many important questions about the role of religion and religious education in VEC schools in modern Ireland. Some of the challenges facing RE teachers in VEC schools are raised as well as some of the opportunities.

The Context – The school

Beaufort College is a DEIS strand one school, part of Meath VEC. Situated in Navan, Co. Meath, Beaufort College is one of four second level schools in the town. It is a co- educational school among three other single sex voluntary second level schools. The school is situated in a town which forms part of the Dublin commuter belt and has experienced a huge rise in population in recent years.

Statistics gathered in 2010 show the school population at around 350 students. Of this figure there were 22 nationalities of European, African, Asian and South American origin. In fact 40% of the student population was made up of international students. Other significant statistics show that 20% of students had special educational needs and 10% of students came from the Travelling community. This evolving student population was and still is reflective of many of the changes which have occurred in Irish society over the previous 10 years.

Today Beaufort College can be described as a school of diversity, diverse nationally, ethnically, socially, culturally, socioeconomically, academically and unsurprisingly diverse in religious beliefs and alternative belief systems. Undoubtedly these changes present challenges to the school community in a number of areas and in particular the place and role of religious education. While the school is by no means typical of the majority of Irish VEC schools the experience of change and diversity has forced those who work there to reflect on these changes, question what they do and how they do it in order to meet the needs of the students it serves in a modern society. Engagement with and fostering of genuine inclusion and integration are part the professional life of the school. This process is not limited to Religious education, the role and place of religion and in particular the development of Religious education have played a significant role in responding to change.

An R.E. teacher in a VEC school

Challenges facing the R.E. teacher include one of identity

What is expected of the R.E. teacher in the VEC school? Many if not most R.E. teachers in VEC schools are inspired by their personal faith and see catechesis (faith formation) as a very important part of their job. At the end of my first year teaching in Beaufort College I was expected to work on a team to prepare the Graduation Mass. That was the tradition in the school. As a Mater Dei graduate and a Catholic in a school serving a largely Catholic majority this seemed like the most natural and expected task. I felt equipped to the task.

Beaufort College was one of the first schools in Ireland to pilot the NCCA Junior Certificate syllabus and exam in Religious education. I soon became very involved in this process and welcomed it as an exciting development. For many passionate about Religious education this represented a formal recognition by society of the value of Religious education in the academic lives of second level students and it also appeared to reflect the importance which Irish society attached to promoting the personal growth of students including their spiritual and moral development. However with these developments, debate emerged within the world of Religious education and soon among those involved in education in general as to what appeared to be two types of religion class. One type involving catechesis or faith formation and another type involving Religious education incorporating an examination and exploration of one's own faith tradition, exposure to world religions as well as the opportunity for meaningful engagement with those of other or no religious tradition. For me there appeared to be two systems at work and I could see the validity and value of both.

One could also argue that together they could work well. Can one really have faith formation without Religious education? Likewise if a student is exposed to Religious education will this not have an effect on their own particular faith and or beliefs?

As the years moved on and the many changes in Irish society became visible it became more difficult to work out my identity or perhaps more correctly my role, a catechist or a religious educator or both? There were more young people in my class from other Christian traditions, other world religions most notably the Muslim faith and young people who did not belong to any religious tradition. In one case a parent had sent their child to the school because they saw it as somehow different to the other voluntary second level schools in the town.

So what exactly is expected of the RE teacher in the VEC school today? Am I a catechist with a role in the faith formation of the Catholic students in my class or am I a Religious educator following the NCCA guidelines preparing all students for exams? Having grown up in the Catholic tradition how relevant is my Catholic identity to the job I do? Now in a multicultural, multi faith, multi belief context this question becomes even more important. What does the school say? What does the VEC say? What does the Diocese say? What do parents want? What do students need? Who is my boss?

School identity and management issues impacting on the RE teacher and RE class

Other challenges within the multi faith/belief R.E. class are the issue of rights. Firstly the constitutional rights of parents to remove their child from religious education be it in a faith formation catechetical style class or a Religious Education class preparing for state exams following a syllabus designed for all faiths or none. The organisation and resources to make this possible are a huge challenge. How can the R.E. teacher respect fully the parents' constitutional rights in this regard if the student is sitting at the back of the class. I have had the experience of a student originally from an area of Europe which experienced religious conflict and whose family had experienced this conflict sit quietly as the class explored and discussed this very topic. Personally I find this challenging. Bar I issue a blind fold and ear plugs I feel that the parents wishes are not fully respected yet I am also aware of the resource issues of supervision and a lack of time table alternatives.

I have also had the experience of having to explain to a perplexed and unimpressed student as to why he is not allowed attend a school retreat. His parents have evoked their constitutional right for the student to be removed from Religious Education. This student is 16. At what point does he/she have a right to decide the form of education he receives? With developments of students councils and Dáil na nÓg at what point do we listen to what students have to say?

In the process of respecting rights and choices another topic emerges for debate. What exactly is the identity of a VEC school? If it is not a voluntary second level school how is it different? Is it really different at all? Is a Catholic school a Catholic school due to its founding tradition and stated mission statement and/or ethos or is it a Catholic school because traditionally it has served a largely Catholic school community i.e. students, families, staff. Would it be more correct to say a VEC school is a multi faith school as the term non- denominational seems to infer nothing of faith goes on while multi- denominational may infer just different Christian denominations. Yet would multi faith as a term really be inclusive to students and their families who are humanist in outlook. Would the term multi belief be more appropriate as I remember a student once who quite rightly reminded me.

“Just because I don’t believe in God Miss doesn’t mean I don’t have beliefs!” The challenge to work out identity is a complex one. The process of a one size fits all policy is not an easy one.

Finally as the process of working out clearly VEC school identity unfolds perhaps too the place and appropriateness of religious symbols, dress and expression. Staff members and occasionally parents will ask: Why do we have a crib on display in the main hall at Christmas especially if we are aiming at inclusivity? Are the other faiths festivals acknowledged and celebrated with public display? How exactly will we understand the wearing of the hijab for Muslim girls? In our school the hijab is black or white and not multi coloured. Is it really appropriate to continue the long established and much celebrated tradition of the sixth year graduation mass? In our school the R.E. department in consultation with and respectful of the students it works with organise a ceremony to celebrate the achievements of all our young people. It contained elements of scripture and English literature, traditional Irish hymns and contemporary chart music.

Many look toward the R.E. teacher for an opinion at least if not at times leadership. For the R.E. teacher support and guidance is necessary not just in terms of policy but quality continuous professional development so the R.E. teacher is equipped to meet the needs of all the students they teach. Involved in preparing young people for a life outside school the principles of knowledge, understanding, skills and attitude are all important. While it is essential to foster a highly skilled and knowledgeable future work force we must remember that we are fostering the growth and development of citizens also. Citizens that live in communities where the principles of connectedness, belonging, freedom to express measured by tolerance are all important.

With challenge comes opportunity

I imagine many R.E. teachers working in communities with similar populations are working through these issues as are school principals and those involved in school management. Arguably so too are entire school communities inclusive of young people, their families and the many faith traditions and belief systems they may represent. For me, I feel very privileged to work as an R. E. teacher in my school and to



IVEA Officers and Staff pictured with Senator Michael Mullins recently at IVEA Headquarters in Naas

grapple with these questions. As an R.E. teacher at both junior and senior cycle, having taught both exam R.E. and non exam R.E., I can see great opportunities for a significant role for Religious education in the Irish education system. Many times I have been amazed by students’ expression of their personal beliefs and faith even if those ideas were not all from the same tradition. If religion or subscription to a belief system is to engage with a search for meaning and value in the contemporary world then this is a good thing.

Firstly I see in my classes the seeds of ecumenism (dialogue between Christian denominations) sown. The concept of ecumenism is one on the junior and senior cycle curriculum but in our school it is not just a chapter in an R.E. book or a question on the exam paper it is very much lived. The crib displayed at Christmas represents a story close to the hearts of all Christians, Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, Evangelical and Pentecostal alike even if they celebrate it differently. For others the crib tells a story of a prophet. For others it is just a story traditionally told at this time of year to those of a particular tradition. The fact it is displayed at all is about tolerance, celebrating similarity as well as acknowledging difference.

Secondly and similarly the value of having students from other world faiths participate in R.E. class is immeasurable. Again the concept of inter-faith dialogue is not just a chapter in a book but a reality in the class. I recently had the experience of refereeing a ‘discussion’ between two students, one a practising Christian (not Catholic) and the other a practising Muslim. They had peered in the hall door to watch preparations for the sixth year graduation ceremony. The Muslim student asked “Can I sing at next year’s graduation?” I asked him what kind of music he would like to sing? He replied “Gospel, or you know that song Miss Amazing Grace”. His friend was taken back a little as was I. His Christian friend responded “You can’t sing Gospel”. “Why not I sang in the show. I can sing”. “No you can’t sing Gospel cos your Muslim”. Thinking that might end the discussion the Muslim student responded. “Remember when we were doing the vision of salvation in Christianity and Islam, well I’m not sure any of the words in that song are at odds with my beliefs as a Muslim”. As the R. E. teacher I’m still not so sure about it. Maybe the student just likes to sing and thought that’s what I wanted to hear. Who knows but his rather well put together argument was a result of the content of his R.E. course.

Similarly when students from different countries and different faith backgrounds can share in a safe place their thoughts and plans for the Christmas holidays, the principles of ecumenism, interfaith dialogue and tolerance are at work. I believe these activities contribute also to the skills of reflection and critical thought essential for a progressive and modern society.

Thirdly, another important opportunity exists within the R.E. class. That is the opportunity to acknowledge and explore the non religious approach to the search for meaning and values in life. Some of my leaving Certificate exam R.E. class tell me they are agnostic. They studied Religious Education for junior cert some have come from other schools, some from other countries. They have chosen to study R.E. as a leaving cert subject. They see the study of Religious education as a viable option for Leaving certificate and perhaps further exploration. While Christians of different denominations and people of world faiths can benefit from being educated together so too can those who subscribe to other belief systems. While respecting their own identity and tradition the mutual opportunity exists to develop tolerance understanding and the ability to think critically about values that are held in common even if what motivates these values may differ.

In conclusion while there are many challenges facing the R.E. teacher in modern VEC schools in a much changed Irish society there are also many opportunities. These opportunities include working toward a more inclusive and tolerant society. There is a need for working out and clearly expressing the role of religion in the VEC school and following on from that the role of catechesis and/or religious education. There is a need I feel for more awareness of diversity in the pre and post graduate levels of teacher training. However if it is the purpose of a VEC school to serve the needs of its communities and in turn a modern Ireland it must do so in consultation with and respectful of the identity and values of those young people and their communities.

To think about

An old man told his grandson, a terrible fight is going on inside me, a fight between two wolves. One is bad, and it represents hate, anger, arrogance, intolerance and superiority. The other is good, and represents joy, peace, love tolerance, understanding, humility, kindness, empathy, generosity and compassion. Wide eyed the child then asked "which wolf will win?" The old man replied simply, "The one you feed"

From www.religioustolerance.org

Effective school leadership critical to improving school outcomes

By Pat O'Mahony, IVEA Education Research Officer

Schools face enormous challenges in cultivating a citizenry capable of responding to the challenges of modern living and, to be able to deliver the outcomes demanded of them, they must be well led and managed. In Ireland, however, school leadership is in the midst of a deepening crisis – that demands urgent and radical surgery.

The players in post primary education (principals, deputy principals, teachers, board of management members and students) generally feel dis-empowered. Everybody owns second level education (the media, IBEC and even the ubiquitous Professor Ed Walsh) except those most intimately involved with it. If our schools are to deliver critical thinkers and lifelong self-directed learners, all players must be empowered to contribute towards the achievement of these outcomes to the maximum of their capacity. And making these contributions must be both energising and rewarding.

This requires a serious reform of the way schools are governed and managed because, without effective leadership and management, organisations are not as effective as they might be. This is not to reflect adversely on those who lead and manage our schools; they do a very fine job in extremely difficult circumstances. The system is defective and it must be reformed if we wish to make progress.

Principalship has lost its savour and many teachers suited to leadership roles are discouraged from applying for such roles by what they see as the overwhelming (and growing) demands of modern principalship. We risk attracting the wrong people to principalship – those unduly influenced by the salary and the status.

There is no clear understanding between management and unions about what leadership and management entails in the school context. This means that far too much responsibility is placed on the principal. At every level of the 21st century school we need both leadership and management, even in the individual classroom, but the balance between leadership and management depends on the role and circumstances of the staff member at any particular point.

The notion of the single omnipotent, heroic leader is redundant. Dispersed leadership and management is critical to schools both defining and achieving their macro and micro goals. In today's school, all must lead, all must manage, and all must be agreeable to being led and managed.

The current in-school management system is not fit-for-purpose. All schools require a middle management system where post holders have clear responsibility and authority for significant management and leadership functions. The job specification for posts should specify the posts' duties and appointments should be made solely on the capacity of applicants to undertake those duties.

This can be achieved by resourcing each school to establish, in line with national guidelines, the in-school management posts that its management authority concludes are essential to the effective operation of their schools.

A fit-for-purpose middle management system is also crucial to developing future school leaders. Currently, we have no option but to appoint to leadership positions those we feel have the potential to be good leaders rather than those who have already demonstrated that they can fill these posts effectively, because the post structure does not give post holders the opportunity to acquire and demonstrate the competences essential to leading schools.

Principals and deputy principals should not have to take responsibility for everything that happens in their schools; post holders can effectively lead learning, pastoral care, and so on, provided they have the necessary competences and authority and are held accountable for carrying out the duties allocated to them. This way schools have an effective middle management system and aspirant school leaders are able both to acquire the competences essential to assuming such roles and to demonstrate their capacity for such roles.

While acknowledging the work of the Leadership Development for Schools (LDS) programme (regrettably being down-sized) in preparing future school leaders, it is still a fact that many principals and deputy principals only begin to acquire the knowledge, skills and competences for management following their appointment and then, by and large, on the job.

Can you visualise a situation in business where the CEO has to learn how to do the job on assuming office? Certainly, no training programme can prepare anyone fully for a new post and neophytes inevitably have to negotiate a learning curve. But, in school management, new principals face not a gentle curve but a sheer precipice.

In Irish post primary schools, principals and deputy principals need to be more than leaders; they need to be competent managers and, oftentimes, they need to carry out functions that in larger institutions could be delegated.

Of course, they must lead their organisations and facilitate the establishment of new directions and goals. But, from their very first day in the job, they must be able to manage their schools and, in doing so, they will have to carry out, or show others how to carry out, a wide range of functions for which they have had no real preparation.

Irrespective of whether or not they have to instruct others in how to undertake these functions, or are required to carry them out personally, they certainly need to understand and oversee the work of those who carry them out. So they need to have a working knowledge, at least, of what each of these functions entails.

Otherwise, their credibility will be undermined from the very beginning and leaders, who do not have the confidence of those they seek to lead, inevitably fail.

If we want new principals and deputy principals to be able to hit the ground running, we must provide suitable aspirant leaders with the programmes that enable them to acquire the necessary competences prior to assuming senior leadership roles in schools.

One solution here might be the development of a HETAC accredited professional qualification in school management (a Higher Diploma in School Management Practice) using an internship model. Professions such as medicine and law include internship in their route to full professional recognition. So, a model already exists. There are some things that we can only learn by doing. The thinking here is that practicing teachers would undertake these internships while teaching

full time in a school in the same way that they would undertake a post graduate qualification while working full time. The only difference would be that most of the learning would be school-based and so would involve the acquisition of knowledge, skills and competences relevant to leading and managing a school. Such internship programmes could be quality assured by the third level colleges offering Teacher Education Qualifications for the post primary sector.

There is no system in place to identify those teachers with the capacity for leadership and scarce resources are expended on training many unsuited to providing effective leadership.

Succession planning is something else that is fundamental to improving school leadership. It is no longer sufficient to wait for leadership talent to emerge. This is not about grooming particular individuals: rather, it is about schools and VECs ensuring that a sufficient supply of suitably qualified applicants is available when leadership positions fall vacant. Succession planning is grounded in the acknowledgement that leadership positions may become vacant without notice and that talent developed in-house may decide to pursue promotion elsewhere.

The idea of the heroic, everlasting leader must be dispensed with. Now schools and schemes must plan to create flows of leadership talent from which they may select new leaders.

Currently, teachers who excel in the classroom and wish to advance their careers have no option but to forsake their teaching and move in to administration to which they may be unsuited. We need a career structure for teachers which allows the best practitioners to get promotion while remaining in the classroom and also leading teaching and learning in the school. Here, there is merit in considering the establishment of the post of chartered teacher, similar to what operates in Scotland. In proposing the establishment of chartered teacher posts, it is appreciated that there are reservations in Scotland about the way the chartered teacher system operates, principally because of the way teachers were appointed to these posts. Notwithstanding, these reservations, it would seem that there is distinct benefit in establishing such posts but, of course, care would need to be taken to avoid the problems that have tainted the Scottish experiment.

Clearly, principals have responsibility for leading teaching and learning but to assign them principal responsibility for doing this is to burden them with a workload that is beyond their capacity – given their other responsibilities. It also militates against the dispersal of leadership and the development of future school leaders.

Today, good school leaders are at a premium and they are free agents. The expectation that a good deputy will eventually replace his/her principal, though seductive, is not well founded.

In this sense, there is little advantage in one school or one sector being strong on leadership development. It is imperative that the whole post primary sector develops better leaders.

To those who may consider this analysis overly pessimistic, the following question is posed. If your school had to recruit a principal or deputy principal next week, would you be confident that you could appoint a suitable person – a person who could literally hit the ground running?

Pat O'Mahony was a post primary school principal for 17 years and is currently the Education Research Officer with the Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA). This is a personal reflection and draws on a paper that he presented at the IVEA's Congress, in Cork, this September.

Taoiseach visits Monaghan Education Campus

Taoiseach Enda Kenny says that the investment in a new VEC campus in Monaghan is 'a statement for the next fifty years'.

Mr. Kenny was speaking at the site of the multi-user education campus on 25 October which is currently in the early stages of construction. Mr. Kenny said that the campus was a stand-out project in an area traditionally neglected when it comes to major investment.

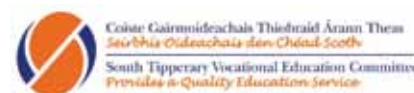
The Taoiseach outlined his belief that the education provided in the new campus should be developed into a brand and that students would be proud and confident that this brand would be the gateway to their futures. He noted that a Gaelscoil and Gaelcholáiste were included in the campus and felt that this was important to promote the Irish language. He congratulated all concerned mentioning the Committee and the CEO, Martin O'Brien and he promised to revisit the site when the work had progressed.

In reply Martin O'Brien CEO thanked the Taoiseach for visiting the site and noted that we had a Taoiseach who understood the VEC sector as Mr. Kenny had been a former chairperson of Co. Mayo VEC. The chairperson of Co. Monaghan VEC, the Town Council Mayor and the Mayor of Co. Monaghan County Council also briefly addressed the gathering.



From left to right: Enda Kenny, Taoiseach, Martin G O'Brien, CEO of Co Monaghan VEC and Declan Kelly, Regional Director, John Sisk & Sons Ltd.

South Tipp VEC groups reach summit of Mount Kilimanjaro



One Participant Makes History Becoming the Youngest Girl to Reach the Summit of Kilimanjaro

In early February of this year Broadcaster, Adventurer, Lecturer, & Author Ian McKeever from County Wicklow phoned South Tipperary VEC and spoke with the CEO Fionuala McGeever, providing details of this project he was arranging. He had many links with South Tipperary as he used to work for the local radio station Tipp FM and so wanted to give something back by offering this opportunity to the young people.

Ian McKeever came to visit the schools in late February of this year, where he gave motivational talks to the students and provided details of his previous climbs up Mount Kilimanjaro. He was offering the staff and students the opportunity to sign up to his "Broccoli" Training and Nutrition Programme and prepare for the climb of Mount Kilimanjaro, which is his way of making students realise that any goal you set in your life is achievable and to think about signing up to climb with him this summer.

After Ian's visits in February, he arranged to return to South Tipperary in March to speak with those who were interested in participating. The meeting was attended by over 70 students, staff and parents. Ian made his presentation on the commitment and hard work that was involved in participating in the project and 19 people from South Tipperary signed up to complete the programme.

Two staff members namely David O'Brien (Teacher, St. Joseph's School, Ferryhouse) and Brigid Ryan (Careworker, St. Joseph's School, Ferryhouse) & three students namely David O'Connell (St. Joseph's School, Ferryhouse); and Luke Mullally & Aodhan Maher (both from Scoil Ruain, Killenaule) set off on their trip and arrived in Kilimanjaro on Monday 27th June. They took to the mountain the next morning and reached the summit on the 5th July which was a huge achievement for each of them. The climb was a total of 8 days, 6½ days was taken to reach the summit & 1½ to return back down the mountain. The group had a day to recover at their

hotel and take in the scenery before boarding their flight back to Ireland on the 6th July.

The remaining 14 left for Tanzania on the 22nd August, where they suffered a slight setback and had to have an unplanned sleepover in Amsterdam due to the bad weather. They arrived in Kilimanjaro on 23rd of August and started on their Climb early the next morning. The group spent 6 days reaching the summit which they did on 29th August, and returned to their hotel the next day to begin their recovery process and take in the local sites and shops. They returned to Dublin on board their flight on 31st August. Climbing in the second South Tipperary VEC group were: the CEO of South Tipperary VEC, Fionuala McGeever, her sister & local business woman Orla Sheehan, Scoil Ruain School teacher Leah McNamara, Sinead O'Neill (SNA of Scoil Ruain, Killenaule); Sarah O'Neill (daughter of Sinead O'Neill); and the following VEC students Keith Hickey, James Hindley, Killian Skorka, Amanda Da Silva (Scoil Ruain, Killenaule); Kerry Ann Cleary (Comeragh College, Carrick-on-Suir); Etain Ryan (St. Ailbe's School, Tipperary Town); Kieran King, Ashlee Hally, Michaela Peters (Coláiste Dún lascaigh, Cahir). The students varied in age from 11 to 18.

This trip will be recorded in the history books for one participant, namely Sarah O'Neill, who hails from Bansha in Tipperary. Sarah's mother Sinead O'Neill worked as a Special Needs Assistant in Scoil Ruain in Killenaule and was present at Ian's motivational speech.



Sinead immediately felt inspired by Ian and when she went home and mentioned it to eleven year old daughter Sarah about doing the climb, Sarah's first response was "No way, are you mad?" However, having slept on it and thought about it, Sarah decided it was something she'd love to try. Sarah would have been your typical child and involved in Gaelic Football, swimming, tennis and participated in P.E. in School. In training for her climb of Kilimanjaro, Sarah climbed the following mountains in Ireland: Log Na Coille, Galtee Mountains, Comeragh Mountains, Carrauntoohill, Glendalough, Slievenamon to name a few. Sarah's fitness levels rose tremendously and she dedicated a lot of time and effort ensure her body was ready for the climb.

At this year's Annual VEC Awards Ceremony which was held on Friday 14th October 2011 in Hotel Minella, Clonmel, there was a first, when a special tribute was paid to the group of 19 people, who all took part in a Climb of Mount Kilimanjaro in the summer of 2011! The group maintained a 100% record of reaching the summit and in the process raised €16,012.37 for their chosen charity "AWARE". Each participant received a piece to commemorate their magnificent achievement, and a presentation was also made to Ian McKeever for his help, support and contribution to the project.

In total this year, Ian McKeever brought 155 people from Ireland to Kilimanjaro and has maintained a 100% record by getting each one of them to the summit. Ian is providing an unbelievable opportunity to so many people and is hoping with the support of the VEC's around Ireland, to next year do the same thing and make it a VEC led project in 2012.

The group dedicated much time and energy to the project where they learned and displayed:

- ▶ The importance of diet (by following Ian's Nutritional Plan and gaining knowledge on foods, nutrition, vitamins, minerals, bloods, etc.);
- ▶ The importance of exercise (by following Ian's Exercise Regime and participating on many mountain climbs around Ireland as part of their training including Glendalough, The Lug, Carruntuohill, Galtee Mor, Slievenamon);
- ▶ The importance of the gear (they learned the different climates that they would encounter on the mountain and how warm it is during the day and how cold it gets at night. They were required to have special gear for the night of the summit because of the cold weather on top of the Mountain).
- ▶ The importance of fundraising (by arranging fundraising events such as Bag Packs, Wax Nights, Race Nights, Darts Competition, Battle of the Bands, Fancy Dress nights, Church Gate Collections, Fashion Shows to name but a few) The group chose "AWARE" as the Charity they wished to raise money for. AWARE is a charity which helps people deal with and defeat depression and is based in Dublin along with offering services all over Ireland. The monies raised by South Tipperary will be put back into services, programmes and support groups in South Tipperary offered by AWARE.
- ▶ The importance of medications and vaccines (the participants were all required to get travel vaccines to protect themselves whilst in Africa and bring medications with them to protect themselves from illness on the mountain).
- ▶ That each participant was required to undertake a DISC psychometric assessment for the 'buddy/buddy' pairings on the mountain and to help them become more self-aware.

The group of 19 was broken up over two trips. Five participated in the trip from 27th June – 6th July; and the remaining 14 participated from 22nd August to 31st August.

VEC scholars honoured



Scholars from Oldcastle in the North to Dunboyne in the South converged on VEC Head Office, Navan for a celebration of outstanding academic achievement in this year's Leaving Certificate.

The annual presentation of Academic Awards for the students from each of the 9 VEC schools and Youthreach Centres who had achieved the highest academic grades in this year's Leaving Certificate was made by CEO, Peter Kierans, EO, Seamus Ryan and Committee members Maria Murphy, Mr. Francis Deane and Joe Reilly. A very well attended awards ceremony saw students receive beautiful specially engraved cut-glass awards marking their special achievements.

Principals spoke of the contribution the students had made to their schools and how they excelled not only in academics but also on the sport's field, in voluntary activity and as colleagues with their fellow students.

CEO, Peter Kierans said that "results of this nature can only be achieved by a combination of hard work by students, exceptional teaching skills by teachers, support from family and active and visionary leadership by the outstanding Principals who lead the nine schools of Co. Meath VEC".

Top Honours this year goes to Community College Dunshaughlin where Rebecca Conlan-Trant obtained 6 A1's and the full 600 points. This is the third VEC School to have a 600 points Leaving Certificate student in the past five years.



Back row: (l to r) Katie Reilly, O' Carolan College, Nobber, Brian Dungan, St. Peter's College, Dunboyne, Emily Glynn, St. Peter's College, Dunboyne, Cormac Fitzsimons St. Fintina's Post Primary School, Longwood, Sarah Healy, Ratoath College, Jack Jordan, St. Oliver Post Primary School, Oldcastle, Emily Maguire, St. Fintina's Post Primary School, Longwood, Eoin O' Connor, Ratoath College, Aaron Dawnay, St. Peter's College, Dunboyne, Kenneth Gargan, O' Carolan College, Nobber, Mteusz Wotjas, Beaufort College, Navan.

Front row (l to r) Jamie Byrne, O' Carolan College, Nobber, Emma O' Connor, Beaufort College, Cheryl Kiely, Ratoath College, Alice Fallon, St. Oliver Post Primary School, Oldcastle, Rebacca Conlan Trant, Dunshaughlin Community College, Peter Kierans, CEO, County Meath VEC, Shane Dowling, Dunshaughlin Community College, Cailín Ní Dhoneacha, Coláiste Pobail Ráth Cairn, Vadym Malychchuck, Beaufort College, Navan.

10th International Asia Europe Classroom Conference comes to Louth



Co. Louth VEC, in collaboration with the Department of Education and Skills and supported by Fáilte Ireland, hosted this year's Asia Europe Classroom Network (AEC-NET) conference. The conference, which is in its 10th year, took place between 07 and 11 November 2011 in the Crowne Plaza Hotel, Dundalk. Over 100 delegates representing thirty-seven countries from around the world attended.

The AEC-NET is a project of the Asia Europe Foundation based in Singapore. The conference alternates between a European and Asian country each year. Previous host countries include India, Denmark, Malaysia, Greece and China. The AEC-NET gathers together post-primary and third-level educators who take a keen interest in fostering collaborations among their students through innovative and interactive collaborative online learning and inter-cultural exchanges.

The theme of this year's conference, **'Apps in Asian and European Classrooms: Unleashing Educational Creativity'**, comprised of four essential components: (1) professional enrichment for participants, (2) a review of past AEC projects and presentations on new AEC project proposals, (3) an introduction to the host country and (4) networking opportunities.



The conference was opened by the Minister for Education and Skills, Mr. Ruairí Quinn, T.D., and included presentations from high profile speakers from across Europe and Asia including Mr. Damien Owens, Registrar with Engineers Ireland, Ms. Chan Lai Peng from the Ministry of Education in Singapore, Ms. Martina Winkel, Artistic Director, Theater ohne Grenzen in Vienna and Mr. Ciaran McCormack, Institute of Art, Design and Technology in Dun Laoghaire. Inputs were also provided by Dr. Harold Hislop, Chief Inspector of Schools with the Department of Education and Skills, Ms. Brigid McManus, Secretary General of the Department of Education and Skills and Mr. Pat Cox, former President of the European Parliament.

County Dublin VEC wins the European Language Label 2011



The European Language Label is a European Commission initiative which recognizes creative and inventive projects to improve the quality of language teaching and learning.

The project put forward by Co Dublin VEC for this award targeted support for migrants in Post Primary schools. The title of the project was “Content and Language Integrated Learning training (CLIL) for subject specialist teachers in the Post Primary classroom. Making the curriculum more accessible and inclusive for EAL (English as an Additional Language) learners”.



Teachers representing 11 Co Dublin VEC schools accepted their Cambridge ESOL exam certificates from Fiona Reynolds (Cambridge ESOL exam consultant Ireland) - located second from the right - next to Dr. Marie Griffin (acting CEO Co Dublin VEC) – last on the right

The initiative to set up this project came as a direct result of changes to Language Support for EAL students initiated in March 2009 – (see DES circular :Meeting the Needs of Pupils Learning English as an Additional Language) which reduced support for EAL students to 2 years’ language support from date of arrival in Ireland.

From the moment international students arrive in Irish schools they are on a conveyor belt along with their peers moving towards the Junior Cert and the Leaving Cert exams. In order for EAL students to reach their potential in Irish State exams subject specialist teachers (History, Geography, Science, Maths etc) with little or no language teaching background needed suitable training to play their part in meeting the needs of International learners with language needs - as recommended by DES in circular letter 0015/2009.

Training took place in five Co Dub VEC Post Primary schools : Lutrellstown Community College (Blanchardstown), Fingal CC (Swords), Adamstown CC, Deansrath CC (Clondalkin) and Greenhills College (Walkinstown). Teachers attended training

voluntarily after school hours and in total, 89 teachers came together from eleven Co Dublin VEC Post Primary schools. The participating teachers sat the University of Cambridge ESOL exam on completion as Co Dublin VEC is an Authorised Cambridge ESOL exam Centre.

The European Commission Jury commented : This project is meeting the needs of learners in post primary schools for whom English is not their first language....The approach is supportive of students with EAL needs across the range of subjects. It should also motivate teachers as student outcomes improve....There were clear objectives and the teachers who availed of the training reported that the training has helped them considerably in their work.....A further application was the use of this training for teachers in the Irish medium schools in Co. Dublin VEC.... Very relevant in the context of mobility across the European Union... The progress and success experienced by the teachers who have undertaken the course should ensure sustainability.

1.6 million awarded to Music Generation Louth, Mayo & Sligo



Ireland's National Music Education Programme
A Music Network initiative, funded by U2 & The Ireland Funds

Music Generation – the U2 and Ireland Funds’ supported National Music Education Programme, which aims to help children and young people access vocal and instrumental music tuition – recently announced Louth, Mayo and Sligo as the first three counties selected for participation in the roll out of Round 1. Over the next three years, Music Generation will award a total of up to €1.6 million to VEC led Music Education Partnerships (MEPs) in Louth, Mayo and Sligo.

Music Generation will provide three-year seed funding to establish local services, which will be sustained by MEPs on a long-term basis. The Department of Education and Skills is committed to continuing the music education partnerships with Exchequer funding in future years, when the Music Generation donations cease.

The call for Round 2 applications was made at Music Generation's inaugural National Seminar held at St. Patrick's College Drumcondra on Tuesday September 14th, attended by over 150 delegates from MEPs that are now established in over 80% of the country. Counties Louth, Mayo and Sligo provided an overview of their ambitious three-year programme, in addition to featuring exceptional live performances given by young musicians from each of the three counties which included Co. Louth harper Michael O'Reilly, Rolling Wave – a twenty-member strong traditional Irish grupa ceol from Co. Mayo, and Quartet for Three – a jazz trio from Co. Sligo.

For further information about Music Generation, visit www.musicgeneration.ie

A professional learning community in Carlow Vocational School



By Nigel Quirke-Bolt, Deputy Principal,
Carlow Vocational school

At the start of the current academic year, September 2011, Carlow Vocational School introduced a 'professional learning community'. The aim of which was to develop further the practice of teaching and learning in the school. This initiative was influenced by needs identified in the school's DEIS Plan, and in cognisance of, and in response to, the growing acceptance of the need to increase both the autonomy and accountability of the teaching profession.

The purpose in setting up a professional learning community was to address two key issues. Firstly, the school's management was keen to provide support for the teachers as they worked, often isolated, in classrooms striving to meet the needs of challenging students and produce lessons that offered high quality intellectual learning tasks for everyone in their classes. Secondly, within the Carlow Vocational school there is a wide range of educational expertise that has built up over a number of years and it was felt that teachers in the school lacked opportunities to share this expertise and productively engage in professional socialisation with their colleagues in the staff room.

The aim of the professional learning community is to provide a structure for teachers to develop collegially as reflective practitioners and improve their professional capacity through learning about and developing their educational and classroom practices. Participants can interact, share

their experiences and knowledge, test and challenge their ideas and process new information with each other. Multiple sources of knowledge and expertise can be harnessed by processing new ideas and practices socially within the school context, which are directly relevant to the teachers' practice.

This 'community' consists of a programme of events, talks and workshops that are offered by members of staff with an expertise that they are happy to share with colleagues. Consequently, teachers are able to choose from a list of various events, talks and workshops, depending on their own individual needs. Sessions are offered during lunchtimes. During the first year over twenty separate topics are offered, for example: Supporting children with hearing loss, Meeting challenging behaviour in the classroom, teaching students study skills, Question and answer techniques, using Moodle, etc.

A feature of the sessions is the use of the schools virtual learning environment (VLE). The teachers delivering sessions can upload PowerPoint presentations, various documents, video clips and other resources onto the VLE. This allows teachers unable to attend the session's access to these resources and notes. In addition, forums have also been created on the VLE to encourage communication between participants and to encourage the sharing of resources, experiences and ideas.

The response from the teachers so far has been very positive, with many of the sessions being oversubscribed. Some teachers have requested additional input on some of the topics, while others have suggested how current practices within the school might be modified to improve student learning. For example, after the Assessment for Learning session a number of teachers asked if 'assessment for learning' could be formally included in the school's 'Subject Planning' activities.

However, these initial positive signs, although welcome, should be treated cautiously. It is important to recognise that to establish fully a professional learning community within a school takes time, and requires on-going dedicated effort from both school management and participants. The 'community' in is very much in the initial stages. During this introductory phase, as we look for further developments, we have found it helpful to adopt Hord's (1997) five key dimensions of professional learning communities; namely: supportive and shared leadership, shared values and vision; collective learning and application of learning, supportive conditions, and shared personal practice.¹

¹Hord, S. (1997) Professional learning communities: Communities of continuous inquiry and improvement. Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

Anti-Bullying Campaign tools for teachers

An Anti-Bullying Website Resource for Irish Second Level Teachers

www.antibullyingcampaign.ie



The Problem of Bullying in Schools

In research carried out in 2008 by the Anti-Bullying Research and Resource Centre, Trinity College, Dublin, 30.2% of students (30.3% girls, 30.1% boys) reported that they had been bullied in the previous couple of months. In addition, 24.9% of students (11.5% girls and 30.9% boys) reported that they had taken part in the bullying of others at school. (Anti-Bullying Centre, 2008). These findings are very worrying.

Bullying takes place in various forms in every school... "... throughout the school environment including the classroom, corridors, playgrounds, toilets and gyms." (Cool School Programme, 2000). It is very damaging to those who are targeted, even when it appears to be relatively harmless. If it is not dealt with it can undermine students, make their school lives miserable, cause serious deterioration in their academic performance and even be so catastrophic as to result, perhaps years later, in suicide. Bullying is a blight on any school and must be dealt with effectively in order that the school can be a safe place for all its students.

Tackling the Problem of Bullying

Have you ever wished you could contribute to reducing bullying in your school? Where would you begin? There seems to be a scarcity of ready-made and easy-to-use practical tools that busy teachers can use in their schools in a campaign to minimise bullying and to deal with bullying incidents when they arise. This may explain why many teachers feel less confident in dealing with bullying than they might otherwise be. This is where our anti-bullying website, www.antibullyingcampaign.ie, can come in.

Our website offers secondary teachers/schools, free of charge, downloadable anti-bullying tools and a school-wide framework in which to use them for an anti-bullying campaign. We have been developing them or adapting them for our use since 2004 in Coláiste Éanna, Dublin, guided by the wisdom of such well-known writers and researchers in this field as Dr. Mona O'Moore (Ireland), Dr. Dan Olweus (Norway) and Dr. Ken Rigby (Australia). This development is on-going, as we try to assemble a bank of effective anti-bullying resources suitable for any Irish secondary school. We offer what we already have to colleagues, encouraged by the fact that by using them in our school the number of students bullied was reduced by half in three years. We offer them in the hope that other teachers who have useful anti-bullying tools/resources will share these with us and, through our website, with colleagues around Ireland. Then all our students can benefit.

The website also includes a discussion forum where, in time, teachers who have been dealing with bullying can share their experiences and advice.

A Two-Strand Approach to Bullying

Our Anti-Bullying Campaign has a two-strand approach, one strand focused on raising awareness about the nature and unacceptability of bullying and the other focused on responding to bullying incidents by following specific steps. Using these two strands a culture of the Three "R"'s can be developed in schools, a culture where bullying is Recognised, Rejected and Reported.

Strand 1 - Raising Awareness about Bullying

Many students, including those who may be involved in bullying behaviour, do not recognise or understand bullying. They need to be made more aware of what bullying is and some may need to be shown that some of their own behaviour is a form of bullying. They also need to be made aware that the consequences of bullying behaviour are always bad for those who are targeted though this is not always obvious at the time.

Strand 2 - Investigating Bullying Incidents

All instances of suspected bullying behaviour in school must be investigated with a view to establishing the facts, bringing the bullying to an end and avoiding a backlash against any of the parties involved. Our website provides the tools you need for this. We begin by avoiding blame and treating the bullying behaviour as a "mistake." We assure students that the intention is to talk to anyone involved in the bullying, to explain to them how harmful their behaviour is and to seek a promise that it will stop. If that promise is forthcoming and is honoured there will be no penalty and that will be the end of the matter. In return for keeping the promise the perpetrator is guaranteed confidentiality - neither the Year-Head nor the school Principal need be informed and everyone can "live happily ever after." However, if a student chooses to break the promise and continue the bullying behaviour, it can no longer be considered a "mistake," the relevant authorities are then informed and a sanction will and should consistently follow for "breach of promise." In our experience this hardly ever happens.

We encourage secondary schools/teachers to register with www.antibullyingcampaign.ie. We will then give you a password that will give you access to the tools and the guidelines for using them. The tools we offer are not a "quick-fix" solution to bullying. There can be no "quick-fix" and there will probably always be some bullying in schools, as elsewhere. However, it can be minimised and in the process bullies can be reformed, bystanders can become more vigilant and supportive of targeted students and the lives of targeted students can be made a lot happier. While this involves a significant amount of work for teachers we believe that there is nothing teachers do that is more important or worthwhile than this.

City of Cork VEC launches iTunes U site - first Further Education site in Ireland



City of Cork VEC became the first VEC to launch its own iTunes U Site in June 2011.

iTunes U is a virtual learning platform available through iTunes on a pc, a mac or a mobile device. Students are very aware of the use of iTunes but iTunes U (University) is an area dedicated to free educational and cultural content.

Top international universities including Oxford, Yale, Harvard and Trinity College display their student and staff material online, where it can then be downloaded for free. Content includes lectures, slideshows, tutorials, etc. With over 850 education institutions worldwide now on iTunes U, the site offers an invaluable learning resource that would have been unimaginable a few short years ago.



The Cork City VEC site is a celebration of the work undertaken by its students and staff in the further education colleges comprising of Cork College of Commerce, St. John's Central College and Coláiste Stiofáin Naofa. These colleges have in total over 4,500 full-time further education students.

For City of Cork VEC the launch of its iTunes site was a milestone in its continued efforts to be a leading provider not just in Cork but in Ireland in the field of further education. Since its launch the site has surpassed all expectations in traffic with over 100,000 hits; in July the weekly traffic was over 10,000 hits. The experience to date will hopefully inspire others in the Further Education sector to follow in the footsteps of City of Cork VEC, who has gained a wealth of experience over the past year since the initial concept first arose.

The City of Cork VEC acknowledges the support provided by Apple in going online and hopes that this project is the forerunner for continued co-operation with the company in the field of education.

Visit the City of Cork VEC iTunes U site at: <http://www.corkvec.ie/itunesu/index.shtml>

For Further Information:

Redmond Jennings

iTunes U Project Manager

itunesu@corkvec.ie



An Gaisce silver medals for Laois Youthreach students

Congratulations to the nine students of Laois Youthreach who were recently presented with Silver An Gaisce Presidents Award Medals.

As well as taking part in various sports and learning new skills such as hairdressing, beauty therapy, Irish and playing musical instruments in order to earn their An Gaisce award, the students set up a school juice and smoothie bar and took part in several fundraising events including "Beauty in Pink" week. These activities helped to raise €610 for the Marie Keating Foundation.

Left to right: Ollie Carroll, Killian O' Connor, Amy Duffy, Jessica McFadden, Sinead Colbert, Brian Quigley, Martin Kelly and Matthew Murphy



Cavan VEC unveils first ever Irish application of Curriculum Mapping



COUNTY CAVAN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION COMMITTEE
COISTE GAIRMOIDEACHAIS CHONTAE AN CHABHÁIN

Cavan VEC has unveiled the first ever Irish Application of Curriculum Mapping, a Virtual Learning Environment Organisational Tool that enables Teaching Staff to collate Teaching and Learning Resources in line with prescribed Curricular Objectives.



Left to right: Colm McEvoy, CEO of Co. Cavan VEC, Anne Looney, CEO of NCCA, Mary Sheridan, Principal of St Brigid's College, Seamus Greene, Principal of Virginia College

Launched by Dr Anne Looney, Chief Executive Officer of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), this unique software application allows teachers to collate a variety of Teaching Resources that incorporate a range of methodological approaches on a Platform that operates over a secure password protected Framework that is seamlessly integrated with Facility Administration software packages.

Launching the network the NCCA CEO identified the key role of ICT in curriculum and assessment in the on-going review and implementation of junior and senior cycle education. "The use of ICT in appropriate contexts in education can add value in teaching and learning," Dr Looney told VEC teachers attending a VEC staff development day. "ICT may also be a significant motivational factor in students' learning, and can support students' engagement with collaborative learning. This Curriculum Mapping Application to the Cavan VEC Virtual learning Environment will greatly assist teachers in collaborate development of high quality teaching and learning resources as well as ensuring immediate access for staff to resources across all schools in the VEC scheme."

"The significant level of integration of ICT into teaching and learning within Cavan VEC over the past few years has been fully supported by the vibrancy, energy and sheer innovation of teaching staff" according to Colm McEvoy, Chief Executive Officer, Cavan VEC. "Cavan VEC and its teachers are leading learning to places that genuinely excite this new generation of connected students - and their teachers too. This resource is helping to make sure that their learning is not confined to a particular building, or restricted to any single location or moment," he told staff.

"The roll out of the full functionality of the VLE - shared teacher resources, shared learner resources, curriculum mapping, blended learning and unique infrastructural capacity places Cavan VEC at the leading edge in terms of the practical integration of ICT into everyday life for staff and students," according to Mr McEvoy. The launch of the VLE follows on from the introduction of Tablet PCs for the teaching of Maths and Science at Virginia College in 2009, introduction of laptops for students in St Brigid's College in 2010, the development of online enrolments at VEC schools and centres in 2011 and the introduction Thin Client Facilities at Breifne College.



Dr Dermot Stokes, Youthreach National Coordinator (on the right) was the last visitor to McCann House before IVEA vacated the premises for new offices in Naas. He is pictured with IVEA General Secretary Michael Moriarty.

Integrated coordinated approach - City of Limerick VEC's ICT Strategy



City of Limerick VEC published its ICT Strategy 2011 – 2015 in June. It highlights the crucial role technology plays in the ongoing development of the organisation as a modern fit-for-purpose public service education body.

The ICT Strategy highlights the crucial necessity for all those engaged in education to also effectively plan for, and, utilise new and emerging technologies. The document details priorities and identifies how these will be implemented. The strategy provides a roadmap to develop City of Limerick VEC's schools and services so that they are truly fit for purpose in the second decade of the 21st century.

In 2010, CLVEC provided education opportunities to 10,500 students and learners in its various centres across the City. The ICT Strategy Team, formed in 2010, identified two specific areas as focal points for the first year of the strategy: Infrastructure and Staff CPD. The decision to invest in a broadband infrastructure delivering minimum speeds of 100Mb to all CLVEC centres was based on an acceptance that many of the organisation's planned ICT developments would require first class connectivity to function effectively. In particular, the move to cloud-based services and the significant ongoing growth of the CLVEC Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) significantly influenced the decision to focus initially on the development of its broadband infrastructure.



iMac Lab at Limerick College of Further Education

Limerick College of Further Education is one CLVEC centre that is majorly benefiting from this initiative. It has 9 state-of-the-art computer labs and relies heavily on ICT for its course provision and to support its administrative systems. Up to this year, the College relied on an overall IP connection limit of 20Mb. This was not at all sufficient to meet its future requirements. Since the rollout of 100Mb broadband in September, staff have been able to increase their engagement of VLE for teaching. Many teachers are now using multimedia-rich content and online resources enabled by high speed broadband. Learners are also more sophisticated in their use of VLE and online resources.

Another positive has been the development of 'StaffShare' a collaborative portal developed using Microsoft SharePoint 2010. The portal is now the key communication tool across CLVEC.

Across all schools, centres and services the adoption of CLVEC's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) Moodle websites has seen a transformation in the learning delivery. One of many examples of its creative use has been in the development of an online course for taxi drivers by Limerick City Adult Education Service. The course's success has led to its utilization by taxi drivers across the country in preparing for their examinations.

This year also saw the launch of an exciting new technology initiative for Gaelcholáiste Luimnigh (GCL); CLVEC's all Irish post-primary college. The scheme, the first of its kind in Limerick, will see sixty Transition Year pupils replace their books with Apple iPads for their three remaining years at the College. All of the TY pupils at GCL can now access teacher notes, resources and assignments through the College's impressive range of ICT platforms, Wikis, Blogs, Moodle, ePortal, Microsoft Exchange and live@edu. "The vast range of free, high quality apps is amazing. It really brings to life the subjects in the classroom. For example, there are thousands of beautiful science apps, the quality of images and the information accompanying really engages the pupils and gives them a realistic sense of the theory that far exceeds a 2D image on a page. Our TY students are blogging their findings each day and it really helps towards independent learning and research", she said.

The ICT Strategy which underpins this plan identifies the range of strategies for CLVEC to fully integrate existing, new and emerging technologies in all aspects of its work. This, according to Paul Patton, CEO, City of Limerick VEC, is essential to the organisation's success; "The GCL iPad highlights the significant value of an integrated coordinated approach to the adoption and use of technology across all CLVEC schools and services. It underlines CLVEC's growing reputation as one of the most ICT proficient VECs in Ireland. This, coupled with our increased use of cloud-computing services, is providing significant time and cost savings across the VEC for the benefit of the organisation, its community of learners and the tax payer."

IVEA HQ hosts National Administrative Staff Seminar

The new IVEA HQ hosted this year's National Administrative staff seminar on the 24th and 25th of November 2011. Following feedback from VECs and a planning meeting with sectoral personnel, this year's seminar included parallel sessions offering increased choice to attendees based on their area of expertise. Significant changes facing VECs including the recent publication of the Heads of Bill, the establishment of SOLAS and the task of managing change were also part of the seminar.



Doreen Ryan and Marion Haughney of Co Carlow VEC



Delegates at the Staff Seminar



Veronica Drury of Co Sligo VEC, Fionuala Cooley of Co Clare VEC, Ciaran Cunningham of Co Donegal VEC and Lisa Doherty of City of Dublin VEC



Martin Cusack of Co Galway VEC and John McNamara of City of Galway VEC