

IVEA

NEWS

Representing Vocational
Education Committees

WINTER 2012

EDUCATION & TRAINING BOARDS BILL

MESSAGE FROM MINISTER FOR EDUCATION
AND SKILLS, RUAIRÍ QUINN T.D.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

IVEA CONGRESS 2012 REPORT



CONTENTS

SECTION 1: Education and Training Boards Bill 2012 2

Perspectives.....	2
The Minister's perspective - Minister for Education and Skills, Ruairí Quinn TD.....	3
Overview of the Education and Training Boards Bill 2012	5

SECTION 2: IVEA Congress 2012 8

Change, Challenge and Evolution

President Noel O'Connor's address to IVEA Congress 2012	8
Minister Quinn's address to IVEA Congress 2012	11

Further Education & Training – Divergence to Convergence

Minister Cannon's address to IVEA Congress 2012	13
Further Education and Training sector should be defined by 'Quality', 'Responsiveness' and 'Connectedness'	15
Reflections on ETBs/SOLAS following the Cork Scoping exercise	17

Development of SOLAS and ETBs represents extensive overhaul of Irish skills training

Michael Moriarty, IVEA General Secretary	18
--	----

European Federation of Education Employers (EFEE) – an update

Bianka Stege, General Secretary of EFEE	19
Minister Cannon launches 'Adult Literacy and Basic Skills in a Changing Sector'	21
Images from Congress 2012.....	22

SECTION 3: Secretariat News..... 23

IVEA Summer Administrative Staff Seminar	23
Joint Committee on Education and Social Protection invite IVEA to discuss back to school costs.....	24
Announcing the LESS Awards: €2000 prize fund for energy-saving VECs	25
Junior Cycle Education	26
Workplace Relations Reform Programme	30

SECTION 4: VEC News 32

County Galway VEC media students win National Award.....	32
County Cavan VEC and County Louth VEC stage National ICT Seminar on 'Teaching and Learning in the e-School'	33
St. Ailbe's of Tipperary Town crowned Formula 1 National Champions for a fourth time	34
Paddy Lavelle is new CEEOA President	35
A note to parents by Jackie O Callaghan, President, NPAVSCC	35
Laois students celebrate exam achievements	36
Co Carlow VEC meet at IVEA Training and Research Centre	36
A presidential time for Youthreach Galway City	37
Outdoor Education Ireland	37
The JCSP Regional Writer in Residence initiative in KES Schools	38
Naas Youthreach project with Kerdiffstown House, St Vincent de Paul holiday home	39
County Meath VEC Scholars Honoured.....	39
Passing of MaryAnn Kane, CEO, Co Donegal VEC	40

Perspectives

The structural reform of further education and training currently ongoing must be recognised as unprecedented in terms of scale and impact. It will affect the working lives of many people in the current VECs and up to 750 working in the FÁS Training Centres which will all become part of the new Education and Training Boards (ETBs)! Staff of all these entities are concerned about their futures and perhaps the most critical challenge facing us all is to integrate staffs from different VECs and/or training centres into one integrated staffing cohort. This will take some considerable time. We can learn from the errors of the past when this aspect of integration was not handled as well as it could have been. Building a coherent staff cohort is an imperative and is a task that will be led by the designated Chief Executive Officers.

There are significant opportunities ahead if we can realise and exploit them. Perhaps the greatest potential will reside within the legal framework establishing ETBs, and this can lead in time to a situation where ETBs can be fully exploited as local education boards. If this can happen then the ETBs can play a pivotal role in the delivery of first and second level education.

ETBs will retain links with their local communities through their board representation, but will also be large enough not to be too parochial. They will have the efficiency of scale to engage with the Department of

Education and Skills, SOLAS and other agencies in an effective manner.

The ETB Bill provides the legislative basis for the ETBs and sets up the infrastructure for the establishment of ETBs. When the ETB framework is established, the challenge then will be to ensure operational efficiency and this will require sufficient staffing levels, structures and expertise. Staffing is crucial if boards are to operate to their full potential. The fear is that the employment control framework (ECF) will be set at too low a level, as the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform seeks staffing efficiencies without any real regard for the absolute need for effective delivery of services. We can go far with efficiencies, but there must be sufficient human capital to maintain service delivery at an acceptable level.

It will take time to bed down the ETBs locally. It will take time also to establish trust within the community of interests in the education sector. But if others can trust, and the ETBs earn that trust, then there is great potential to enhance the range of benefits for all the stakeholders.

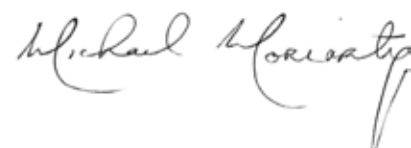
For example, ETBs can support stand-alone boards of management in other schools in regard to the management of building projects. Likewise, ETBs can play a significant role in the provision of IT supports and some VECs already provide IT support to primary schools. Some VECs currently have psychological support services, and there is potential for extending such services to all schools within an ETB catchment area.

For all this to happen, and for the benefits to roll, we need to have a firm level of trust established between the school patrons. We can look to each other to see how we can cooperate

to ameliorate the worst effects of the current and future cuts in resources. Schools within a defined catchment area can demonstrate sufficient ingenuity and flexibility to work together to share the burden, and to see how they can operate in the most efficient manner possible. "No man is an island," and in times of stress and strain, supporting each other through times of crisis can be more beneficial than remaining fully aloof as solo operations.

It is hoped that the ETB structure will provide the local framework to facilitate a more cooperative approach between all schools. The cuts will continue for the next two years – the government has made that clear. Is now not the time to "box smarter", to look at the potential for the ETB to support schools working together? Surely this is an approach that would be welcomed by the DES, and should be welcomed by others, if their autonomy and independence is fully recognised and understood.

Time will tell, and we shall see, how the ETBs are established, how they are embedded into Irish society, and how they develop within the broader education sector. In the meantime we await the real start to the process of structural reform which began with the publication of the ETB Bill.



The Minister's perspective - Minister for Education and Skills, Ruairí Quinn TD

By Minister for Education and Skills, Ruairí Quinn TD



Minister for Education and Skills, Ruairí Quinn TD

For over 80 years, Vocational Education Committees (VECs) have played a vital role in the education of our young people and those who are returning to education. The extremely difficult economic circumstances we are all faced with have underlined the important role of VECs, perhaps more than ever before.

The VEC sector offers a wide range of options in a community based setting for our students, for school leavers looking to widen their skills and for those who are returning to education as adults, perhaps after being unemployed and in search of a new career.

As I said at the IVEA Annual Congress recently, I firmly believe in the value of education which is governed nationally and managed democratically at a local level. The expertise, experience and deep understanding which VECs have built up must be utilised to the greatest extent possible as we adapt our education system to the needs of the 21st century.

There are two key areas in which I think this sector can grow in the coming years. The first is taking a greater role as a provider of services to the wider education sector, and as a tier of administration between my Department and individual schools. Secondly, I want VECs to assume responsibility for providing both education and training services at local level.

This ambition for the future needs to be underpinned and strengthened by new legislation. On Friday 5 October last, I published the Education and Training Boards Bill which will pave the way for the establishment of 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs), replacing the current 33 VECs.

The Bill provides for the establishment of the newly configured bodies, reforms and modernises their governance provisions, removes outdated terminology and articulates the functions of the boards to better reflect the current and evolving role of VECs. It will assist in the transformation of VECs, which is already underway, into modern ETBs fit for the purposes we most need in our very changed society. These ETBs will be at the heart of shaping the further education and training needs of our people and our nation.

This new Bill will replace the nine existing Vocational Education Acts with one piece of primary legislation. It will strengthen locally managed education and enhance the scale of local education and training. The Bill also represents a major component of the public service transformation agenda.

Significant preparatory work is already underway in advance of the establishment of the new bodies. I am looking forward to debate on the legislation, which I intend will be fully enacted by the end of the year.

In brief, the main provisions of the Bill are:

- ▶ The establishment of 16 ETBs to replace the existing 33 VECs
- ▶ The new ETBs are to be composed of 18 members comprising ten local authority representatives, two staff representatives, two parents representatives, and four members from bodies representing community/business interests
- ▶ A requirement on ETBs to publish strategy statements (similar to the existing education plans which VECs produce)
- ▶ The streamlining of the annual planning process

The Education and Training Boards Bill 2012 is available at:

<http://www.education.ie/en/The-Education-System/Legislation/Education-and-Training-Boards-Bill-2012.pdf>



- ▶ The regulation of committees established by ETBs, including those that act as boards of management of schools operated by an ETB
- ▶ The creation of a power on the Minister to require an Education and Training Board to establish a school or other education or training institution
- ▶ The ability of an ETB to operate in the area of another ETB when directed to do so by the Minister
- ▶ Reform of certain existing human resource provisions, including the ending of the statutory inquiry system used in considering whether or not a VEC member of staff should be removed from office
- ▶ The Government will be bringing forward a separate piece of legislation to provide for the establishment of the new Further Education and Training Authority to be known as “SOLAS”. It will provide for the dissolution of FÁS and the transfer of their training centres to the newly established education and training boards

Change is often difficult and fraught with fears of the unknown. However, I have been very heartened by the positive and constructive engagement the Department of Education and Skills has had to date with the VECs through the IVEA and its General Secretary, Michael Moriarty.

The transformation of the VECs to the Education and Training Boards is very much a priority project for Government, and a key part of our public reform agenda. It is the right thing to do for the sector, but it is also the right course of action for the citizens of Ireland who rely on education and training services.

The process to identify and designate the new CEOs for the Education and Training Boards is complete. There are still some steps to be taken which are the subject of ongoing discussion with the people involved. But constructive progress is being made.

I also want to reassure you that the existing committee members will continue to serve together on the merged bodies until the local elections of 2014. In parallel, the Department of Education and Skills will continue to engage with the relevant stakeholders, including trade unions representing staff in the VEC sector, in respect of the detailed implementation of these mergers.

The Oireachtas has its work to do in debating the ETB legislation this autumn. While this is ongoing, I hope the Chairs of each VEC and the CEOs will work with their administrative staff, teaching staff and VEC Committee members to ensure the merger process is successful and is handled delicately and sensitively.

We cannot forget about the day job while this process takes place. We must ensure the delivery of educational services to citizens remains unaffected during this reform process. For that reason, in the immediate period to year end, the detailed planning and preparation for establishing the new boards must have a strong focus on ensuring a seamless continuity of day to day services.

As 33 VECs cease to exist on one day, 16 local Education and Training Boards must open their doors the next day. On that day, all administrative and support services to schools and centres for education must be fully functional.

I want to acknowledge and express my appreciation of the support to date from VEC staff, committee members, parents, teachers and students during this process. Together, we can ensure the creation of 16 new Education and Training Boards will strengthen local education services as we continue to meet the educational challenges of the 21st century.



IVEA General Secretary Michael Moriarty with Mr Henry Heng, CEO of the Council for Private Education (CPE) in Singapore, a statutory board with legislative powers since 2009 to regulate Singapore's private education sector. Representatives from the CPE were in Dublin to learn about Irish post-secondary education structures, with particular reference to the VEC concept, and Irish quality assurance systems.

Overview of the Education and Training Boards Bill 2012

By Niamh Ginnell, BL

Part 2 – Education and Training Boards

Section 8:

Provides for the Minister to specify a day as the establishment day, being the day on which the new education and training board areas and the bodies themselves will come into being.

Section 9:

Formally establishes the new Education and Training Boards. Schedule 2 outlines the geographic area in which each board will operate under the revised configuration.

Section 10:

Details the functions of Education and Training Boards which include:

- ▶ providing for the establishment and maintenance of education and training board schools, centres for education and education or training facilities in its functional area;
- ▶ establishing and maintaining such institutions at the direction of the Minister;
- ▶ planning, providing, coordinating and reviewing the provision of education and training in those bodies as well as in children detention schools, prisons and facilities maintained by other public service bodies;
- ▶ establishing scholarships;
- ▶ adopting strategy statements and annual service plans;
- ▶ delivering training for bodies who provide funding for this (e.g. SOLAS);
- ▶ supporting the provision, coordination, administration and assessment of youth work services; and
- ▶ assessing the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of its functions.

Section 12:

Sets out the reserved functions to be exercised by the members of an Education and Training Board. They include:

- ▶ requesting a change of name of an Education and Training Board; appointment or suspension of the CEO;
- ▶ establishment of a scholarship;
- ▶ adoption of a strategy statement, annual service plan and annual report;

- ▶ acceptance of gifts or becoming a trustee;
- ▶ authorisation of members' attendance at certain events;
- ▶ establishment and dissolution of committees and related matters;
- ▶ receipt of reports prepared by the finance or audit committee and the determination of what action, if any, should be taken as a result of the finding of such a report;
- ▶ power to borrow money;
- ▶ keeping of accounts; and
- ▶ the acquisition, development or disposal of land.

Section 14:

Sets out that the appointment of a chief executive of an Education and Training Board must be in accordance with any procedures determined by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform or the Minister for Education and Skills with the consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

Section 14(3):

States that a chief executive's terms and conditions of employment will be determined by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform or by the Minister with the consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

Section 17:

Provides for the suspension and removal of the chief executive. It states "an Education and Training Board may suspend a chief executive for stated misbehaviour or where it appears necessary for the board for the effective performance by the board of its functions".

17(5) A resolution to suspend must be passed by two-thirds of the members of the board.

17(7) If the Education and Training Board suspends the chief executive this must be notified to the Minister.

17(10) The Minister must then establish an advisory panel who reports on the matter.

17(11) When the advisory panel has reported, the Minister then makes a decision to lift the suspension, confirm the suspension or remove the chief executive.

Section 18:

Provides for the appointment of Education and Training Board staff.

18(2) The terms and conditions of staff will be determined by the Minister with the consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

18(3) Permits an Education and Training Board to pay staff remuneration, allowances and expenses as the board, with the consent of the Minister and the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, determines.

Section 20:

Provides for cooperation between Education and Training Boards in the performance of their functions.

20(3) Allows the Minister to direct Education and Training Board to perform a function jointly.

20(4), (5), (6) Provide for the Minister to notify an Education and Training Board of such direction(s) and for the Minister to take into account representations received from the Education and Training Board/s in question in response to such notification.

20(7) Allows the Minister to request the Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA) to assist boards in the joint exercise of functions which are the subject of ministerial direction.

20(8) Requires the compliance of Education and Training Boards with such ministerial directions.

Section 21:

Confers the Minister with the authority to direct an Education and Training Board to carry out a function in the functional areas of another Education and Training Board.

Section 23:

Sets out that the chief executive of each Education and Training Board is accountable to the Public Accounts Committee.

Section 24:

Sets out that the chief executive of each Education and Training Board is accountable to Oireachtas committees other than the Public Accounts Committee.

Part 3 - Membership of Education and Training Boards

Section 28:

Sets out the composition of the new Education and Training Boards. It provides that there will be:

- ▶ 10 local authority representatives;
- ▶ 2 staff representatives;
- ▶ 2 parents' representatives; and
- ▶ 4 community representatives.

28(3) Confers the ministerial power to determine by way of order, the proportion of members to be drawn from each local authority and goes on to state that the Minister will have regard to relative populations in making that order.

28(6) Relates to the election of staff representatives

28(7) Relates to the election of parent representatives and provides that each national association of parents must nominate one man and one woman.

28(8) Relates to the election of community representatives and allows for the Minister to draw up a list of bodies that can make nominations for membership (e.g. business interests,

community groups, other patrons or education/service providers, etc.). The core board (local authority members and staff and parent representatives) will co-opt 4 people from the nominees of the bodies specified by the Minister.

Section 30:

Sets out the eligibility requirements for being a member of an Education and Training Board. A person must be (subject to certain restrictions under the Bill):

- ▶ an Irish citizen or ordinarily resident in the country; and
- ▶ be over 18 years of age.

30(2) Allows the Minister to declare certain people holding certain posts, ineligible for election, the intention being that for corporate governance reasons, the chief executive, any person performing chief executive functions and/or other members of senior management could not stand for election, where it would potentially cloud the reserved/executive functionality distinction or create potential conflicts of interest arising.

Section 31:

Sets out the circumstances, in which a person ceases to be a member of an Education and Training Board, including:

- ▶ where a person ceases to be a local authority member;
- ▶ a member of staff of the Education and Training Board; or
- ▶ to have children in an Education and Training Board institution.

Such persons will cease to be a member if elected or appointed as a local authority, staff or parent representative respectively.

31(2) Allows a parents' representative, whose child has been excluded from a school to remain a member of the Board pending the outcome of any appeal under section 29 of the Education Act 1998.

Part 4 - Regulation of Education and Training Boards

Section 37:

Confers on the Minister power to issue legally binding directions on an Education and Training Board.

Section 38:

Confers on the Minister the power to appoint a person to carry out an investigation into the performance of an Education and Training Board.

Section 39:

Confers on the Minister the power to notify an Education and Training Board of his or her intention to give a direction in relation to the performance of its functions, having considered the investigator's report.

Section 40:

Allows the Minister to transfer the functions of an Education and Training Board to the chief executive of that Board or to another person for a period of up to 2 years, where the Minister believes that the Education and Training Board has failed to comply with a ministerial direction or where there are serious deficiencies in the Board carrying out its functions.

Section 41:

Provides for the circumstances in which the Minister may remove all members of an Education and Training Board where the Minister is satisfied that the Board has failed to comply with:

- ▶ a ministerial direction following an investigation into the operation of the Board;
- ▶ court order; or
- ▶ has refused to submit its accounts to the Comptroller and Auditor General for audit.

Part 5 - Committees of Education and Training Boards

Section 42:

Provides for the establishment of Committees of Education and Training Boards. It goes on to state “the establishment and dissolution of a committee, the determination of its terms or reference, regulation of committee procedures, appointment and removal from office of committee members and confirmation of an act of a committee are all declared by Section 12 to be reserved functions”. The section prohibits the chief executive and other members of staff, with the exception of staff representatives on the Education and Training Board, from being a member of a committee.

42(11) Confers power on the Minister to make directions (including rules around composition and that such committee members must live in the locality), in relation to committees which act as boards of management (by agreement, VECs establish subcommittees to act as boards of management in respect of each of their schools) of recognised schools, centres for education, other education or training facilities and children detention schools, prisons or other public education and training facilities.

Part 6 - Finance

Section 44:

Imposes a duty on the Minister to set a provisional expenditure limit for an Education and Training Board as early as possible in the financial year and to confirm the final limit as soon as possible.

Section 48:

Grants Education and Training Boards the power to charge for services they provide, subject to the consent of the Minister.

Section 50:

Requires Education and Training Boards to act in accordance with ministerial guidelines and directions in respect of internal audit matters.

Part 7 - Dissolution of Bodies

Section 52:

Dissolves the VECs which will be replaced by Education and Training Boards as established under this legislation.

Section 53:

Provides for the transfer of liabilities from the former VECs to the new entities.

Section 54:

Provides for the transfer of property rights from the existing VECs to the new entities.

Section 55:

Provides for the transfer of staff to Education and Training Boards or other public service bodies. This must be done in accordance with procedures determined by the Minister with the consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform following consultation with recognised trade unions and staff associations representing the people concerned.

Part 8 – Miscellaneous

Section 60:

Repeals the exclusion of certain categories of employees from the provisions of the Unfair Dismissals Act 1977.

Section 61:

Repeals section 24(13) of the Education Act 1998 (as amended by section 6 of the Education (Amendment) Act 2012) which requires disciplinary action involving VEC school staff to take cognisance of the VEC Acts' provisions in relation to suspension and dismissal of staff.

Note: This article is issued by way of overview of the recently published Bill and is not intended to deal with all sections of the Bill.

Change, Challenge and Evolution

President Noel O'Connor's address to IVEA Congress 2012

The President of the Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA), Noel O'Connor, in his address to the 108th Annual Congress of the IVEA in Cavan, said ...

Indiscriminate effects of employment control frameworks undermine the work of schools and further education and training services

'The indiscriminate effects of employment control frameworks (ECFs) and the dismantling of a significant proportion of middle-management posts in schools' is putting the quality of education and training at risk.'

'Unreformed, employment control frameworks will 'erode public services' and it is 'students' futures that are put at risk.'

Congress calls for national convention of education partners

'We need now to look again, without prejudice, at the management infrastructure in our schools.'

'This Congress calls for the convening of a national convention of education partners with you, Minister, and your officials, so that, working in partnership, we may agree an approach capable of supporting a world-class education system, in the context of available resources, with adequate management and administrative supports.'

'The time has come to wipe the slate clean and devise a new fit for purpose, and cost effective, model of school management and leadership that guarantees, the best possible educational outcomes for our learners. This cannot await a return to prosperity: it must be commenced now.'



Cllr Noel O'Connor, President of IVEA

School management is stretched to the limit

'School management is stretched to the limit' and functions that should be undertaken by post holders keep landing on principals' desks, as they are being asked to lead' critical educational reforms, that 'will not be realised, unless school leaders are freed up to lead them.'

'Posts essential to the effective delivery of education and training must be maintained. Teachers will need to be flexible, management will need to be resourceful, and we all will have to make the best possible use of ICT to facilitate the learners' journey – indeed, to underpin everything that we do.'

ICT key to educational and economic progress

'To recover our prosperity we need to modernise our education and training system and 'the key here is committing fully to using Information and Communications Technology (ICT) as a learning tool in all schools.'

'We need to develop the capacities of schools, colleges and centres to deliver learning experiences through digital technologies'.

'We need to transform the way learners learn, provide more flexible learning pathways; and remove barriers that hinder access to education and training. Adults should be able to learn at the times and places that suit their particular circumstances, rather than those that suit the provider'. 'The appropriate exploitation of the power and ubiquity of ICT ... can more than anything else, facilitate this change.'

'No school student or no adult learner should miss out on what ICT can do to enhance teaching and learning. Neither, can Ireland afford to lose pace with the rest of the world. Even developing countries are already in the race. For example, in 2009, Uruguay became the first country in the world to equip every primary pupil with a laptop.'

Call for new strategic funding framework for ICT

'IVEA calls for the development of a new strategic funding framework for technology in education and training, one that maintains the State's investment and facilitates partnerships and matching funding, from the technology industry, to complement the State's investment.'

Significance of China in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)

'Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) has been the principal driver of economic growth' but we pay insufficient attention to China, which 'has accumulated 30% of the world's total foreign reserves and is looking for a congenial place in which to invest them.'

Importance of Chinese language and culture courses

'If we want attract Chinese investment, we need to convince the Chinese that we understand and respect their culture and we need the language skills to communicate with the Chinese.'

'Producing a 'significant number of professionals, across a wide range of disciplines, with a fluency in Chinese'... demands strategic leadership from the DES – a leadership focused on clear, time-bound outcomes.'

Time to reallocate curriculum resources to Mandarin

'It may be time 'to reallocate some of the resources currently allocated to other areas of the curriculum towards the teaching of Mandarin, in our schools and in our third level institutions? Sweden is committed to teaching Chinese in all primary schools by 2021, and in all schools eventually'.

Manifest need for more resources to ensure that guidance and training needs of unemployed are appropriately met

'While we need to restructure our FET system to make it more efficient and effective, this, of itself, will not enable us to meet the needs of all who need upskilling'

'If we are to realise the objective of providing unemployed people with a skills assessment, followed by appropriate training to give them employability, ... more resources must be made available to deliver a significantly greater number of FET places ... and we will need a significant increase in the number of career guidance professionals – both in NEES and in ETBs'.

'There is little point telling the unemployed to retrain, if they cannot access training that is relevant to their particular needs and aptitudes, and the needs of the job market'.

Decision to remove schools' entitlement to ex-quota guidance counsellors regrettable

Removing 'the 'entitlement of schools to ex-quota guidance counsellors' resulted in principals this summer having to 'choose between providing appropriate subject options to students and providing them with guidance and counselling.'

'The stark reality is that, even prior to the budget decision; second level students were not having their counselling needs met'.

'The Irish Journal of Psychological Medicine's recent report on the mental health of second level students is alarming, as is the 2012 My World Survey of 14,500 12 to 25 year olds and the claim of Dr Ian Gargan, clinical director of the Imagine Health clinics, that, in the last two years, there has been a 30% increase in the number of people under 18 seeking treatment at some frontline clinics for mental health issues.'

'Students have a myriad of non crisis needs for guidance and counselling on a daily basis but if these 'run-of-the-mill' needs are not met as they arise, they can seriously affect the capacity of these young people to make the most of their education and their lives'.

'The guidance and counselling needs of students have changed significantly over the years'

Call for Task Force to review guidance and counselling in schools

'Congress calls on the Minister to 'establish a task force ... to review guidance and counselling in schools and to provide a set of specific and achievable recommendations for ensuring that the guidance and counselling needs of second level students are met satisfactorily – in a cost effective manner'. This task force 'to publish a draft report by the end of this school year'.

End of VEC era

'In existence since 1930, VECs followed on from the previous Technical Instruction Committees, and served Ireland well through good times and bad. Their abiding concern for the marginalised and disadvantaged will always be remembered. The commitment, foresight and innovation of committee members, CEOs and staff built an organisational network of schools, colleges, centres of education, literacy services, community education, student grants and ancillary services, that history will record as unique and extraordinary.'

'While we will be marking the passing of VECs at an appropriate time, before Congress 2013 comes around, VECs, as statutory bodies, will have passed into the pages of history, and, today, I want to salute their proud record of achievements. 'Ní bheidh a leithéid ann arís'.

Concluding Comments

In concluding his remarks, Noel O'Connor said:

'We do not have the option of telling this generation of learners that many of their needs have to go unmet – until prosperity returns. Because it is the meeting of those needs today that will ensure tomorrow's prosperity'.

'Of course, resources are an issue, but if we all work together constructively, government, management and unions, to find ways of confronting our challenges, we have every chance of confounding challenges that currently dazzle us with their intensity'.

'As Henry Ford noted: 'coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success'.

'Despite all difficulties that beset us, VECs, on the threshold of becoming ETBs, have the opportunity to redesign the future of education and training right across this land; and I have no doubt but that they will rise to this challenge.'

Minister Quinn's address to IVEA Congress 2012



Minister for Education and Skills, Ruairí Quinn TD

Introduction

I firmly believe in the value of education which is governed nationally and managed democratically at a local level.

It is my firm view that the expertise, experience and deep understanding which Vocational Education Committees have built up over the last 80 years must be utilised to the greatest extent possible as we adapt our education system to the needs of the 21st Century.

There are two key areas in which I think this sector can grow in the coming years. The first is taking a greater role as a provider of services to the wider education sector, and as a tier of administration between my Department and individual schools.

Already, many VECs are managing the construction of school buildings on behalf of the Department. But over time, we can also foresee a vision where VECs provide a range of supports and services to all of the schools in their areas.

But equally important is your role as direct educators.

The forthcoming transfer of the FÁS Training Centres to the VECs will mark the end of FÁS's role as a service provider and the opening of a new chapter for your sector.

Thirty-three VECs will soon undergo a radical transformation into 16 new Education and Training Boards.

The announcement of the patronage of 13 new post-primary schools in July has shown that you will continue to have a growing role in the provision of post-primary education in Ireland.

Similarly, the announcement of 4 new primary schools under VEC patronage is a great sign for your future role.

Also at primary level, it is clear that the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism will lead to a radically changed landscape in the primary school sector overall.

Primary, post-primary, further education and training – all areas where locally managed education is going to become more prevalent in the coming years.

Your future is looking very bright indeed.

VEC Reform

The Government will shortly be introducing the Education and Training Boards Bill 2012 into the Dáil, which will repeal nine pieces of legislation, and replace them with one consolidated Act.

I intend to have it fully enacted by the end of this year.

Most of you may be aware that the process to identify and designate the new CEOs for the Education and Training Boards is complete. There are still some steps to be taken which are the subject of ongoing discussion with the people involved.

I also want to reassure you that the existing committee members will continue to serve together on the merged bodies until the local elections of 2014.

Put simply, bringing about the merger will require good teamwork and cooperation.

For that reason in the immediate period to year end the detailed planning and preparation for establishing the new boards must have a strong focus on ensuring a seamless continuity of day-to-day services.

This means good internal communication and participation with committee members and staff. As the process proceeds communicating with the local communities will also be important.

SOLAS

The other piece of reform which must proceed is the abolition of FÁS and the establishment of a new Further Education and Training Authority to oversee the sector.

We have a responsibility to build a vibrant skills and training sector integrated into the overall education system. In this context, the ETBs have a critical role to play.

The State is investing significant resources in further education and training programmes – €900m is being spent this year alone on the provision of 270,000 places to enhance the education and skills levels of citizens.

The Further Education and Training sector ... is one of the great hidden stories of our education system.

Programmes are currently provided by many different organisations – too often in an uncoordinated fashion. This has to change.

There is an urgent need to bring coherence to the fragmented system, and to have an integrated sector delivering high quality programmes. That is why we decided to establish SOLAS.

- ▶ SOLAS will lead the process of putting the FÁS training centres under the remit of the new Education and Training Boards.
- ▶ SOLAS will not be delivering courses on the ground. That is what you and your colleagues will be doing in the new Education and Training Boards.
- ▶ SOLAS will have many parallels with the role of the Higher Education Authority in Higher Education.

The unemployed, particularly long term jobless, have to be the priority group for support.

A revitalised FET sector must be 'fit-for-purpose' for all who wish to avail of programmes.

We want SOLAS to work with ETBs to harness what is good about our further education and training system and make it even better for those who use it.

We are putting the finishing touches to the Action Plan for SOLAS.

It will set out clearly a timetable for publishing the SOLAS Bill, and set out plans for FÁS Training Centres to be transferred to the ETBs.

I look forward to working with the IVEA as we continue this reform in the coming months.

Role of the IVEA

This time next year, VECs will have become local Education and Training Boards.

The value of having the IVEA as representative body is evident, both now in terms of the immediate changes that are about to take place, and also given the prospect of the wider role ETBs can perform, that need will remain.

Indeed, given the future potential role for the sector that I have mapped out today, I believe you will need to consider how you can define and develop your role to reflect the expanded function of the ETBs.

In particular you will need to look at how you can most effectively discharge your functions as a management body whether in relation to matters of industrial relations, sharing of best practices, ensuring a cohesive and cooperative approach to service delivery and the development of future strategy across all ETBs.

Pluralist Education

I do not want a secular education system. I want a pluralist system that provides parents with choice in relation to the education of their children.

Your schools, whether designated to one religion or not, have long been recognised as some of the most inclusive schools in the State.

Our country is more diverse now than it has ever been. And the education system must continue to adapt to that diversity

It is why the New Schools Establishment Group has been set up. To ensure that the patronage of new schools is granted based on what parents actually want.

In March, I announced that I was endorsing the recommendations of the New Schools Establishment Group in relation to the creation of 13 primary schools to open this year and next. Four of those schools will open as Community National Schools, under the patronage of VECs in Dublin and Cork.

In July, I announced that I was endorsing the recommendations of the New Schools Establishment Group in relation to the creation of 14 new post-primary schools.

From Cork to Claregalway, and Naas to Navan, parents across the country recognised the potential of the vocational sector to manage post-primary schools. Nine of the 14 new schools will be under the patronage or co-patronage of VECs.

I congratulate you on the support you have received from parents and communities.

If a pluralist system of education is important at second level, that must also be the case at primary level. That is why I established the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector as one of my first acts in office.

Forum on Patronage and Pluralism

The Forum report sets out ways for our primary schools to reflect this transformed society and provide for increased diversity.

Next month will see the Department begin to survey parents to determine whether there is a need for schools to be divested to new patrons.

I look forward to the outcome of the surveys, and to continuing debate over coming months and years, as to the role ETBs will play in the newly emerging landscape at primary level.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we have an ambitious change agenda underway across all levels of education, all of which significantly impacts upon the vocational sector.

Time has not permitted me to speak about the range of other reforms underway in the education sector.

- ▶ A new literacy and numeracy strategy is bringing the focus of our education system back to basics.
- ▶ We are developing proposals for a new junior cycle programme.
- ▶ We are also looking at the transition from second-level to higher education.
- ▶ And we have successfully created SUSI – merging 66 grant-awarding bodies into one, under the management of CDVEC.

It is essential that this change is delivered if we are to create a future education system that we can be proud of.

In partnering us in delivering this change, you will be making an invaluable and essential contribution to building the reformed society and economy that we need.



AN ROINN
OIDEACHAIS AGUS SCILEANNA
DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Further Education & Training – Divergence to Convergence

Minister Cannon's address to IVEA Congress 2012



Minister for Training and Skills, Ciarán Cannon TD

2013 will be a very significant year in the Further Education and Training Sector. It will be a year of change and challenge, of consolidation and reorganisation and indeed, of moving from divergence to convergence.

Education is not about filling a bucket but lighting a fire and since my appointment as Minister for Training and Skills, I have seen at first-hand how brightly that fire burns, both within the teachers and tutors working in VECs, and in the learners who participate in all manner of courses at every level in every conceivable subject area. This ethos of encouraging learning – at all levels – makes the VECs exceptional in this sector.

We need that spark – whether that is through upskilling or re-skilling, a return to education or to training – to burn brightly so that our people can enter the labour market or return to work and continue to contribute to our society and our economy.

One could look at our current system of further education and training and say that it is divergent. We have two quite distinct sectors, managed separately, administered separately and operating in parallel.

- ▶ One – the further education system run by the VECs – has developed organically over the years, with a mosaic of provision at different levels and operating in different modes.
- ▶ The other – the training system – has developed with a single managing body at its head and with a different but similarly complex breadth of provision at different levels in different areas.

I put it to you that if we look more closely at these seemingly separate – and divergent – systems we may find that they have more in common than we realise. The decision to establish SOLAS was taken in order to bring those convergent areas to the forefront and to enable us to jointly address those divergent areas with one common goal: improving opportunities for learners.

While on first glance the systems may seem vastly different – one a very localised or regionalised system run by 33 statutory bodies, the other managed by one body – the outputs are similarly complex and various. Only in the further education and training sector could we find courses as diverse as equestrianism and wind turbine maintenance. There is a lot of cross over as well – both FAS and VECs deliver many courses in ICT and business skills. In this way, both systems are addressing similar needs through similar courses but just in different ways.

Given that it invests some €900 million in further education and training, providing opportunities to some 270,000 people every year – the Government has asked the question: is two systems the best way to go? Can we improve how we spend this money in order to give more and better opportunities to learners?

That is the context in which the Government decided to establish SOLAS.

SOLAS is about combining the best of both systems. It is about combining the need for an overall strategic direction – which can only really be delivered by a single body – with the need for local and regional expertise – which can only be delivered by local and regional bodies.

We need to combine resources at a central level in certain areas to coordinate, support and assist the local and regional bodies in the management and delivery of provision. SOLAS – operating hand-in-hand with the new network of Education and Training Boards – is fundamentally about enhancing the service to learners.

What will this mean for you? First of all, the Department will still set overall policy. However, and second of all, it means that the ETBs will have responsibility for all FET, including that which FAS delivered. SOLAS won't be delivering any FET and the FÁS training centres will transfer to their local ETB.

SOLAS will lead on strategic development but will not be doing this in isolation. It will research, analyse and plan in consultation with you and your colleagues in the new ETBs as well as with learners, employers, and other state agencies such as the CSO, Forfas, Enterprise Ireland and the IDA.

In light of the challenge posed by the large numbers of unemployed people, a particularly important role, SOLAS will have is national liaison with the new National Employment and Entitlements Service, managed by the Department of Social Protection.

SOLAS will support ETBs in developing FET programmes and curricula, as well as developing them itself in certain cases. SOLAS will support ETBs in sourcing private and not-for-profit sector interventions where required and the development of innovative new service delivery mechanisms.

SOLAS will monitor performance and outcomes. Here, SOLAS will lead on improving and enhancing our data collections. I think that this is vital – we need more and better data to inform our decisions. We need improved ICT systems to support these collections so that they are not a massive burden on our limited resources.

Over the past few months, the Department has issued new operational guidelines for part-time further education as well as guidelines for aligning further education with enterprise skills needs.

These themes were very much to the fore through the formal consultation process and the information seminar I attended at Croke Park last March. The message from across the board was that SOLAS must be learner-centred.

I have to emphasise the importance of a partnership approach and as chair of the SOLAS Implementation Group, I can categorically state that the IVEA input, on behalf of VECs, has been first class.

The Group was charged with drafting an Action Plan and I hope to publish that Plan very shortly. It will go into some detail in relation to the way we will deal with the changes we have to make.

With your continued support, we can address all of these challenges and implement this major change agenda.

We have come a long way since the announcement in July 2011 of the intention to establish SOLAS, but we still have a way to go. I am committed to leading this reform and I ask you all for your help along the way. I want a Further Education and Training system that really delivers improved outcomes for individuals, employers and communities. I want a world class system. It is one step on the road to building a better, stronger country and together we can achieve it.



Further Education and Training sector should be defined by 'Quality', 'Responsiveness' and 'Connectedness'

By Tony Donohoe, Head of Education and Social Policy, IBEC

A significant opportunity to redefine further education and training (FET) is presented by the creation of SOLAS and the new local education and training boards (LETBs). However, this opportunity will be missed if the project scope is limited to a transition programme for merging VECs and FÁS. Our goal should be a FET system which targets support for individuals and employers where it is needed most, and allows colleges and providers to deliver the excellent service we must have as we move towards a sustainable vision of a high-skills, high-employment, high-productivity nation.

Therefore it is essential that all publicly-funded FET programmes:

- ▶ provide value for money;
- ▶ are as effective as possible in improving the knowledge, skills and competencies of those in employment - changes in technology, business processes and markets make the shelf life of current skills significantly shorter;
- ▶ provide access and progression opportunities for those who wish to progress to third-level education;
- ▶ assist unemployed people to acquire the skills needed to access and progress to further employment, training or education opportunities.

Addressing these twin challenges – delivering better outcomes for clients while simultaneously securing better value for money – highlights the importance of putting the issues of 'quality', 'responsiveness' and 'connectedness' at the very centre of the redesign and reconfiguration of the further education and training sector.



While a lot of work has been going on in the background, the only official output to date on which we can comment has been the Heads of the Education and Training Boards Bill. And based on this, IBEC is concerned about the lack of ambition for these local structures and their potential to connect the different elements of the education, training and employment service/labour activation system. It is in this context that we see some very obvious gaps:

Business and Employers – it seems extraordinary that boards, with overall responsibility for providing individuals with the right mix of skills and competences, would not have very strong representation from the business community. FET providers should have structures through which they can stay in close contact with industry so that they can (i) build appropriate content into their education provision, (ii) have appropriate content ready to build into courses as demand materialises and (iii) provide stand-alone modules to give existing and aspiring employees the skills they require to move into new roles as they emerge. Apart from the local labour market intelligence that business representatives bring, they can also provide a specific perspective on the type of employability skills that can be developed through the curriculum in the earlier stages of the school system. We have also reached a stage where we need to consider new models of professional and vocational education in Ireland. These could draw on some of the most applicable features of the dual education systems in Germany and some other north European economies.

Higher Education Institutions – FET has a critical function in providing access and progression routes for individuals to continue their studies at institutes of technology or universities. It is noteworthy that the Higher Education Authority is also working on the development of regional clusters of different types of education institutions. LETBs could bring the FET and the higher education sectors together in a way not previously envisaged.

Public Employment Service (NEES) – it is envisaged under the Government's Pathways to Work initiative that 'one-stop shops' will refer unemployed people to appropriate vocational training and education programmes. However, there still appears to be a lack of clarity around the provision of guidance and counselling – the 'glue' that will hold NEES and the FET system together. Responsibility for this should be located in one service.

Quality Assurance Agency – There should be a close relationship between SOLAS and Qualifications and Quality Assurance Ireland (formalised through legislation and with representation on each agency's board) in relation to monitoring and evaluation of FET and in ensuring consistency of standards.

While all of the above sectors, institutions and agencies could be included in the new structures, their representation should be 'hardwired' into the legislation. They should be part of the core decision-making bodies and not be dependent on any other nomination process.

As the National Economic and Social Council has explicitly stated¹:

Much has been and is happening to overcome inertia in education and training systems and to increase their relevance to labour market developments and their responsiveness to learners' needs. Where necessary, producer interests have to be named and challenged. Filling course places legitimately benefits institutions and their staff but, if the courses do not demonstrably advance unemployed people's best interests, it is fair to question the value for money being achieved and even to suspect a degree of collusion in 'massaging' the unemployment figures. By contrast, deepening the dialogue between the worlds of education/training and work and increasing the speed and effectiveness with which providers respond to the current high unemployment levels enhances in a major way the credibility of what is offered and the level of enthusiasm for the National Skills Strategy.

It is important to ensure an appropriate mix of public and private provision. Future FET programmes should be based on the principle that 'public money should follow consumers rather than suppliers'.

There is also learning to be derived from the multiple provider model deployed across the Labour Market Activation Fund programmes. This involved VECs, third-level institutions, community and voluntary organisations and private sector providers. The PA Consulting evaluation found that this provided flexibility for tailored, responsive and market-focused interventions, despite initial concern from stakeholders at the involvement of private sector provision. The report identifies four main principles which should characterise the future of labour market activation:

Assessment of Need – Providing locally based solutions that recognise the differing needs of different cohorts among unemployed people and demonstrate the demand for the targeted skills from local employers and validation of need by all other relevant stakeholders (e.g. DSP, community organisations, local authorities, education and training providers).

Engagement – Ensuring there is a clear, single access point for those experiencing unemployment to understand and apply to participate on an activation measure, with a central source of information available on all the opportunities that exist, the eligibility criteria and the benefits that would arise from engagement.

Delivery – Deploying a multiple provider model for labour market activation measures that includes the public, community and voluntary and private sectors to facilitate flexible, tailored, responsive and market-focused approaches that ensure all interventions focus on a pathway to employable skills.

Outcomes – Ensuring, as far as possible, a work-based component to the intervention or following the intervention, engaging local employers in provision, with a clear idea of the progression outcome and pathway to work for each individual. Ongoing monitoring and support is critical to ensuring sustainability of such outcomes.

Given the economic circumstances, it is not surprising that a large section of this article deals with the relationship between FET and labour market activation. However, the sector has a critical role in meeting the needs of people in-employment. Ireland's economic recovery depends on the skills and flexibility of its labour market. There is a particular cohort of individuals, currently in precarious employment or where skills are becoming obsolete. They also require upskilling or retraining and it is important that provision is made for them.

To meet the needs of diverse learners with diverse schedules, it is important that a range of programme delivery methods are offered. A blended learning approach in particular has been found to be effective in terms of employee engagement and learning. This involves a combination of classroom and online learning which offers more flexibility to students in terms of when and how they learn, while also not losing the benefits of having a teacher.

The scale of change being undertaken will be challenging for staff in the various bodies and they will require strong leadership and support. The experience of business mergers suggest that the longer that uncertainty and a vacuum exists, the greater the damage to morale. Given the importance of the project, a greater sense of urgency is required.

SOLAS and the new LETB structures also require adequate finance and resources. Education and training is the single most important investment block for Ireland's future growth and prosperity. The availability of skills and talent is essential to helping drive improvements in productivity, ensuring business and employment growth.

To cope with these demands, we need a further education and training system that can react flexibly and adapt accordingly. The further education and training sector should be at the core of lifelong learning to strengthen economic development, enhance social cohesion, and advance the skills and abilities of individuals. The sector should aim to be recognised for its excellence in training standards, provision of training and guidance, and its performance outcomes.

¹ Supports and Services for Unemployed Jobseekers. Challenge and Opportunities in a Time of Recession. National Economic and Social Council. August 2011.

² Evaluation of the Labour, Market Activation Fund, (LMAF) 2010 Final Report, PA Consulting.

Reflections on ETBs/ SOLAS following the Cork Scoping exercise



By Ted Owens, CEO,
City of Cork VEC



The establishment of ETBs early in 2013 and their gradual assumption of the delivery of all further education and training is to be welcomed. This development will result in greater coordination and less duplication of provision and a more focused, innovative, flexible response to the needs of learners, employers and for the economy. While there were different levels of cooperation in different parts of the country, by and large FÁS and the local VEC operated independently with little collaboration and cooperation, leading to competition and duplication of effort.

During the year, many VECs (both committee members and employees) and FÁS staff queried why their organisations were being effectively abolished and why SOLAS and ETBs were being established. If one is to be objective there is probably a need for an over-arching body, such as SOLAS, to devise policy on the funding of further education and training and which would endeavour to ensure that there was national coordination and planning in the delivery of further education and training.

There was also an argument made, rightly or wrongly, that medium and smaller-sized VECs lacked the critical mass to be considered significant players in the educational landscape in which they operated. While the creation of ETBs will hopefully provide the critical mass, the future relationship between SOLAS and the ETBs is even more crucial for the effective delivery of further education and training. ETBs must work closely with SOLAS. There must not be a “them and us” situation; the dual roles of both organisations must be complementary. SOLAS must be a resource and a support for the fledgling ETBs.

The experience we have gained in Cork in carrying out the scoping exercise we undertook to determine what would be involved in an ETB taking responsibility for FÁS training showed that there are some very practical issues to be overcome. The scoping reports that the City of Cork VEC previously circulated detail at some length these challenges, such as the fact that FÁS has highly centralised national systems in place for assessment, programme development, funding, payment, and reporting whereas VECs have a variety of different administrative systems and computer solutions and each VEC has its own quality agreement with FETAC. FÁS operates on an income/expenditure basis versus receipts and payments in the VEC sector. VECs are direct providers whereas 80% of FÁS training is contracted.

But system considerations must not mask the very real human aspect to these developments. VEC staffs, already apprehensive about the changes involved in the creation of ETBs, are even more concerned about the changes necessary to accommodate SOLAS/FÁS. FÁS staff must be even more worried as they face being subsumed into a different organisation entirely. On that score, the FÁS senior management perspective on the establishment of ETBs is interesting. FÁS is communicating to employees that FÁS is being abolished, VECs are being abolished and a new organisation called an ETB is being established which will fulfil the roles of the former bodies. On the other hand, ETB staff may consider that further education and training is not their main activity and that the establishment of ETBs is essentially an amalgamation of VECs, with an add-on responsibility for FÁS training. These different points of view will need to be reconciled at an early stage of any merger.

Rather than outline in detail all of the differences and challenges identified in the Cork Scoping documents, I would like to take this opportunity to just give a flavour of the impact of merging the two organisations, the VECs and FÁS, bearing in mind that the merger of two or more VECs into an ETB will be prove difficult in itself.

Few in the VEC sector yet realise the profound effect that subsuming the Training Centres will have on the fledgling ETBs. Training Centres are not FE Colleges, neither do they operate in a similar manner and their scale of operation is not something of which we have previously experienced. The Cork Training Centre is only one unit, but its annual budget is on par with a medium size VEC. To give just one example, it is the biggest user of industrial gases in Cork, no mean feat when you consider the scale of industry around Cork Harbour. This has serious implications for Health and Safety and the statutory provisions surrounding the maintenance of gas equipment. Its annual day-to-day maintenance bill comes in at around €700k, a level of expenditure we in the VEC would normally only have on capital projects.

The operational finance is constructed on a unit cost basis, down to cost per trainee/per course/per day. There is far greater emphasis on estimates and forward planning. The skillsets required to manage such an operation are quite different from those of a College Principal. Inevitably, this difference in emphasis will impact across the ETBs over time, even more so when SOLAS will require a greater breakdown in our course costing than the VECs currently measure.

The use of external trainers will be another learning curve for Committees and, in particular, how best to utilise them in conjunction with existing VEC resources and how they will integrate into a VEC/ETB Quality Assurance regime.

As previously mentioned, administrative information is highly structured in FÁS, with staff relying on the FÁS Intranet for practically every bit of operational information. Individuals do not keep their own reference files, everything is on the Intranet. Replicating this across the ETB will be a challenge, but the certainty and uniformity it will provide over time will be worth the effort.

Merging the culture of the VEC, which is generally light touch management of schools, with the highly centralised management culture of FÁS, will prove a difficult process: it will not be something that happens overnight and it will require a tremendous amount of initiative from the newly designated CEOs to make it happen.

Administrative and financial systems will not be in place for Establishment Day and short-term solutions will need to be put in place. Initially SOLAS head offices will continue to support the operation of the training centres either directly or through ETBs. It has now become clear that not all FÁS training centres will transfer to ETBs at the same time, rather it will happen on a phased basis as individual ETBs are ready to assume responsibility. The VEC sector must realise that FÁS has highly developed systems which might prove the basis for many of the administrative/financial software solutions if SOLAS and the Department of Education and Skills are prepared to fund the introduction of these systems to the overall ETB sector.

In conclusion, this is a great opportunity for those in the vocational education sector and in FÁS to prove their mettle. VECs often complain they are undervalued and their contribution to Irish education has been underestimated. FÁS workers who have given tremendous service in training thousands of young people and the unemployed since the establishment of the organisation feel that their efforts have been denigrated by the reputational damage caused by a few former officials. There is now an opportunity for employees in both organisations to show that they are capable of providing a world-class education and training sector in an ETB structure.

Development of SOLAS and ETBs represents extensive overhaul of Irish skills training



IVEA General Secretary, Michael Moriarty

"The proposed establishment of both SOLAS and a distinct Further Education sector represents the most extensive overhaul of Irish skills training in many decades," said General Secretary Michael Moriarty in his address to IVEA Congress 2012 in the Slieve Russell Hotel, Co Cavan. He continued:

Further education is to be amalgamated with skills training, and both will be delivered by the proposed Education and Training Boards (ETBs) under the strategic guidance of SOLAS, the new Further Education and Training (FET) authority. This mainstreaming of the FET sector brings it centre stage as a stand-alone sector similar to the First, Second and Third Level sectors.

The re-focus of FET on the world of work and the skills needs of job seekers and other learners will streamline a more efficient service, from government policy level, to SOLAS strategic level, to Education and Training Board (ETB) implementation level.

SOLAS will not be 'FÁS 2', as the direct training provision will now be the responsibility of ETBs, which will deliver training programmes directly, or through contracted services. SOLAS and ETBs will agree annual Service Level Agreements to define their respective relationships and roles.

ETBs will not be bigger VECs, and their direct links with the local authority structure will be severed. ETBs will be more akin to agencies of the Department of Education and Skills.

Mr Moriarty concluded:

The transfer of the current sixteen FÁS Training Centres to the ETBs has not been fully appreciated for what this will mean. For example, FÁS currently targets up to 87,000 learners annually, with an average of 22,000 learners participating monthly. The responsibility for this training will now rest with the ETBs, which must mean that the footprint of the ETBs will certainly be more pronounced in their local communities as they will have greatly extended responsibilities across the entire spectrum of education and training.

European Federation of Education Employers (EFEE) – an update

By Bianka Stege, General Secretary of EFEE



Bianka Stege, General Secretary of EFEE in conversation with Minister for Education and Skills, Ruairí Quinn TD at IVEA Congress 2012

Who is EFEE?



The European Federation of Education Employers (EFEE) is an officially recognised social partner of the

European Commission, closely associated with initiatives the Commission takes in the fields of education and labour market policies, two worlds that become more and more intertwined. Because of this, education and training – traditionally part of national competence – become increasingly European topics.

As a recognised social partner we are regularly consulted by the Commission on education, social and employment policy issues. We take part in the European social dialogue with trade unions representing staff in education and can make agreements with them at European level.

We are now a rapidly expanding network representing education employers across Europe from all levels of education, from pre-school, to primary and secondary school, vocational/further education, higher education and research and adult education, including different national organisations (education councils, associations of colleges & universities, ministries, local and regional authorities). In total we have 28 members representing 18 Member States.

Our mission is to improve the quality of teaching and school management through European cooperation and dialogue. How could the quality of school teaching and management

be improved? If you ask this question to several education providers, you will probably get as many different answers as there are providers. Answers will differ depending on the type of provider, the education level or the national system. We are therefore not aiming at selecting one best practice, but at exchanging good practices, at learning from each other, and discussing together common challenges we all face. All of these challenges demand change and evolution.

Challenge

Together with IVEA and other EFEE members, we are currently working on a proposal for the project “Matching education with labour market needs in Public Services”. As you might know, this spring the European Commission launched its ‘Employment Package: towards a job-rich recovery’ to address the challenge of rising unemployment rates in the EU. In particular, the alarming number of unemployed youngsters is pointed out in the package. In order to tackle this problem the transition from education and training to work needs to be improved.

During this project, we together with our partners wish to face the challenge of the current economic situation: high unemployment rate with many youth being unemployed. The objective of this project is to focus on what kind of competences are needed to make sure that graduates / young students can adapt to the demands of public services providers in the future. This will be done by bringing on board, from the start, employers, education and training providers and business organisations on board.

At the same time, we are of the opinion that it is really difficult to predict the future labour market needs. We simply do not know how exactly the European labour market will look like in 2020/2030, just as we could not foresee the current labour market and Europe’s high unemployment. But, what we do know is that we need to prepare our young European students for a life full of challenges ahead. The world of today is changing, as we all are witnessing the current economic, political and social changes.

We need to make sure that our students have the generic skills, knowledge and aptitudes for a labour market that is yet unknown and uncertain. If our students, besides their general education, have good social skills, good presentation skills, good language skills etc., they will be better prepared for a modern and demanding labour market. If they are capable of continuously learning, in a formal and non-formal way, they have a real advantage. Innovative and creative students are able to adapt to the demands of the (always changing) labour market. Internships, apprenticeships, study and work abroad (mobility) are really contributing to their development.

Change / Evolution

Employability is another term we hear a lot these days. Employability and good education is more than excellent PISA results, or adapting our current school systems to the labour market of tomorrow. It is about educating civilised human beings who are capable of searching for a job, can present themselves at an interview, can use their skills and adapt to the demands of the labour market. And it is also about educating others to have the entrepreneurial spirit to start up their own business.

The next very important question is how we, as education employers and education providers, can contribute to that. We need to make sure that the skills of our teachers, our professors, our researchers and our school leaders are excellent, up to date and modern.

How do we achieve this?

We need to continuously improve self-evaluation systems for teachers and schools, in order to keep our teachers' skills up to date and school management accountable. Evaluation, or ideally self-evaluation is an important tool for identifying future professional needs of teachers. It will help schools to foresee future challenges and improve their quality.

In our project on "Self-evaluation of schools and teachers as instruments for identifying future professional needs" we anticipate the growing trend towards self-evaluation of schools and teachers, and the changing role of the inspectorate. In many European countries, the role of school inspection is changing from one of control to supporting and inciting improvement. Systemic self-evaluation is effective in helping schools to identify directions for change. It is in this spirit that we are organising our peer-learning project. We are offering our members the possibility to visit three different EU countries (Netherlands, Sweden and Cyprus), each with a different evaluation system. We would like our members to learn from their peers. We will also look at the role of the school inspection and the concept of school as learning communities.

School Leadership

One of our most important concerns is the area of School Leadership. Good school leaders will inspire and motivate teachers to get the best out of them. Good teachers will inspire their students, and get the best out of their students. The increased recognition of the responsibility of school governors for school quality and performance (among others, student results) is the main focus of our new project called "Professional autonomy, accountability and efficient leadership". Furthermore, the position and role of employers and trade unions will be discussed and what they could contribute to improving educational performance.

We, at EFEE, are working with our members and the trade unions on these topics of Skills and Competences, Self-evaluation and School Leadership. Our role is our mission: to improve the quality of teaching and school management.

Importance of Dialogue and Cooperation

I will conclude this article by underlining the importance of European level cooperation in the field of education, especially in these challenging times and most especially in the area of Vocational Education and Training.

I would like to refer to the New Skills for New Jobs policy of the EU (part of the EU2020 Strategy) that underlines the importance and role of VET in the overall education structure once again. VET is high on the EU agenda, ever so more since the Bruges Communiqué. This means that at European level a lot of new programmes for the VET sector will come up.

I would say that the EU, particularly the European Commission is promoting the cooperation between countries, between regions, between schools, between students, between teachers. The idea behind is to learn from each other, from peers and to build an INCLUSIVE society—through the promotion of learning and training.

Learning languages, promoting citizenship, promoting transversal skills for all students and teachers: all of this is based on the European social model which is built on the idea of opening up to new cultures and new ideas!



Cllr Madeleine Argue, Chairperson, County Cavan VEC speaking at the opening of IVEA Congress 2012

Minister Cannon launches 'Adult Literacy and Basic Skills in a Changing Sector'

'Adult Literacy and Basic Skills in a Changing Sector' was launched by Minister for Training and Skills, Ciarán Cannon T.D at IVEA Congress 2012.

It was developed by the Adult Literacy Organisers' Association (ALOA), on behalf of the Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA) and with the help and support of NALA (National Adult Literacy Agency).

The idea for the publication came about as a result of a proposal from the ALOA to the VEC Adult Literacy Forum to the effect that the ALO forum might undertake a piece of work, on behalf of the IVEA, around the issues that would need to be considered by ETBs in integrating basic skills education into their integrated further education and training services. The ALOA proposal was then referred to IVEA's Committee for Executive Support, which endorsed it.

Subsequently, the ALOA devoted a considerable portion of their own Annual Conference to exploring the issue and what emerged from these deliberations formed a basis for the development of the publication.

Across the developed world, basic skills (Communication, Numeracy, Information and Communication Technology) are seen as the missing piece in an individual's skill-set. Oftentimes, an individual is not able to reach his/her potential (in education, in the family or in the workplace) because of a basic skills' deficit.

IVEA would like to thank the ALOA, under the leadership of Colin Cummins, Siobhan McEntee and Niamh Maguire, for the work they put into getting this important document written and published.

The document does exactly what it sets out to do, concisely and precisely – in a way that anyone can follow. It has simplified issues that have been clouded in mystery for too long.

Hopefully, it will inform the work of ETBs in the years that lie ahead.

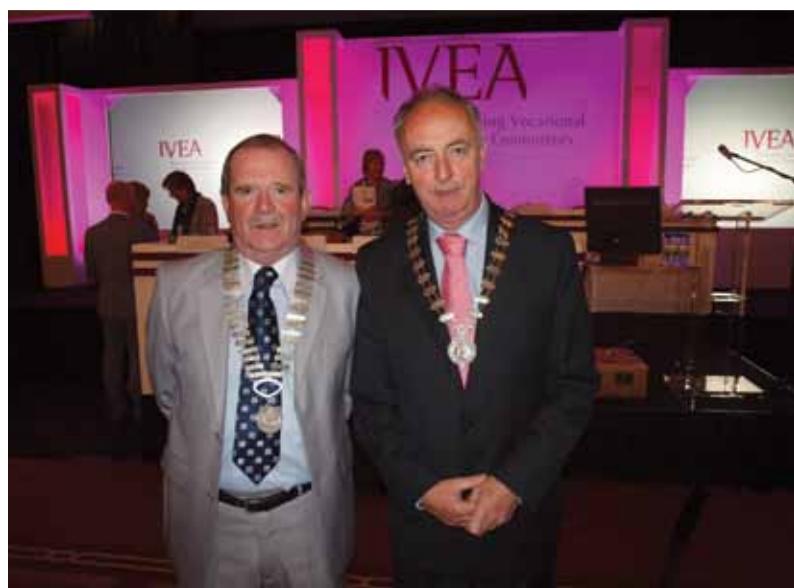
A copy of this publication is available on the IVEA website:

<http://www.ivea.ie/publications/booklets.shtml>



Left to right: Pat O'Mahony, IVEA Education Policy & Research Officer, Fiona Hartley, Executive Director (Designate) of SOLAS, Colin Cummins, ALO, City of Limerick VEC, Siobhan McEntee, President of ALOA and Minister for Training and Skills, Ciarán Cannon T.D at the launch of the "Adult Literacy and Basic Skills in a changing sector" document at IVEA Congress 2012

Images from Congress 2012



IVEA Summer Administrative Staff Seminar

IVEA's Summer Administrative Staff Seminar took place in June at IVEA Training and Research Centre and Kilashee House Hotel in Naas.

Following a welcome by Michael Moriarty, General Secretary of IVEA, on Wednesday morning, a session on "Data protection and its implications for VECs and Schools" was presented by Millis & Matthews Solicitors. Hillary Mooney of the HSA then covered the topic of "Health and Safety in the Workplace". The afternoon commenced with a discussion on "The Changing Landscape of Public Procurement" featuring Gwen Moore, PSR Coordinator, IVEA and Seamus O'Neill, Senior Procurement Manager, National Procurement Service. A presentation on "The Selection Process" by Co. Donegal VEC HR followed. A busy afternoon concluded with a session on "Child protection and the Children First Bill" presented by IVEA's Pat O'Mahony and Niamh Ginnell.

Thursday morning began with a hugely engaging panel discussion aiming to provide "an overview of sectoral changes – differences in VEC versus ETB legislation, aggregation, ETBs, SOLAS etc. The panel consisted of: Dalton Tattan, Principal Officer, Department of Education and Skills, Michael Moriarty, General Secretary, IVEA, Fiona Hartley then President, CEEOA and Mr Pat Bolger Assistant General Secretary, IMPACT. The Seminar then concluded with a session entitled "Minding Ourselves during challenging times" by Moodwatchers. Feedback following the seminar was very positive.



Delegates at the IVEA Summer Staff Seminar



Emma Gleeson and Pauline Mogen of Co. Tipperary N.R. VEC



Angela McVann of Co. Mayo VEC with Margaret McLoughlin of Co. Kildare VEC



Carlow VEC's Michelle Whelan and Mary Whittle

Date for your diary
IVEA Winter Administrative Staff Seminar 2012
6th and 7th December 2012
Venue: IVEA Training and Research Centre and Kilashee House Hotel
Looking forward to another successful seminar!

Joint Committee on Education and Social Protection invite IVEA to discuss back to school costs



By David Campbell, Principal of Scoil Ghráinne Community National School

IVEA was invited to present to the Joint Oireachtas committee on Education and Social Protection on Wednesday 10 October. The topic under discussion was the rising back-to-school costs for parents. All the main primary school patron bodies were in attendance. Representing the IVEA were Mr. Michael Moriarty (General Secretary, IVEA), Dr. Marie Griffin (CEO of Co. Dublin VEC) and Mr. David Campbell (Principal of Scoil Ghráinne Community National School).

The broad consensus among all the presentations was the point that costs to parents cannot be viewed in isolation to the broader ecosystem of costs in primary education. As a consequence of generations of government policy to part fund primary education; there has resulted a reliance on parents to bridge any deficits that occur within a school's budget. Some of the current facts and figures relating to costs of primary education are as follows;

- ▶ Back-to-school costs are estimated by parents at €487 per primary school pupil.
- ▶ Capitation for primary schools stands at €183 per pupil per annum.
- ▶ Indicative cost of one primary school book is €10 - €15.
- ▶ Back-to-school clothing and footwear allowance is €150 per child aged 4-11 years old.

Some of the main expenses to parents and to schools are highlighted in figure 1 and figure 2 respectively.

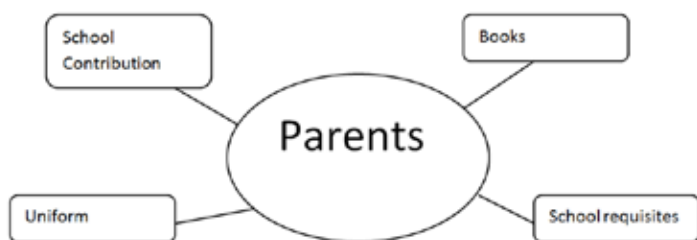


Figure 1

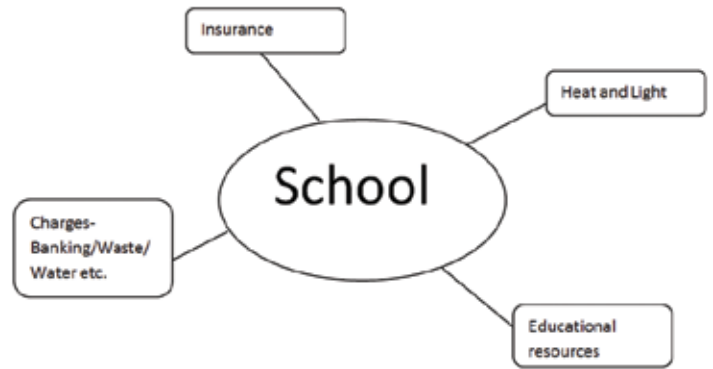


Figure 2

Two of the most emphatic suggestions made by the primary school patrons (including IVEA) were;

1. The peculiar position whereby primary schools must pay VAT, rendering up to 23% of the grants they receive from government redundant, should be abolished.
2. The impact high and increasing energy costs are having on schools including standing charges should be examined. The energy companies could be invited to present their suggestions on how to improve this situation to the Joint Committee on Transport and Communications.

In relation to the first named point; while it was made by several patrons and the committee undertook to examine the issue, one can assume a certain opposition on the part of government to narrowing of the tax base in any, even this most miniscule, degree. The second proposal relating to energy costs, however, wherein points were made such as charging schools a night rate or implementing more favourable standing charges would have no impact upon the exchequer.

During the course of the meeting there was an examination of the benefits that may accrue if patrons were to engage in central purchasing. The IVEA was able to point to the savings that the Community National Schools have already been able to achieve in the areas of insurance and ICT through their respective patron VECs.

It is a very positive sign that the IVEA was invited to partake in the discussion as the voice of patrons of primary schools. The Community National Schools are a relatively new addition to the educational landscape and one which the IVEA strongly support. The inclusion of the IVEA in such fora is welcomed as we have a unique and important voice to add to any debates or discussions in the field of primary education.

Announcing the LESS Awards: €2000 prize fund for energy-saving VEC's

Teams from VEC Schools and Centres to save and win

By Gwen Moore, PSR Coordinator, IVEA

The LESS (Leading Energy Saving School) Awards encourage and recognize excellence in energy management in VEC schools and centres across Ireland. By taking part in the competition, participants are rewarded by saving energy and can also share in a prize fund of €2000. Staff and students from VEC schools, centres and head offices are invited to work together in preparing their entries. This could be an ideal class project/activity or staff team-building exercise.

Any VEC that has participated in SEAI grant schemes (2009-2012) can enter. This includes Co Kildare VEC, Co Meath VEC, Co Louth VEC, City of Limerick VEC, Co Offaly VEC, Co Carlow VEC, Co Laois VEC, Co Monaghan VEC, Co Cavan VEC, Co Cork VEC, Co Donegal VEC, South Tipperary VEC, Co Galway VEC, Scoil Bhríde N.S and Scoil Mhuire Soisearach N.S.

There will be four competitions as part of the LESS Awards, which are sponsored by Enprova:

Competition 1: Design Logo

Closing Date: 12 October 2012

Winner: €250 One4all voucher

Runner-up: €150 One4all voucher

Details: design a fun, colourful logo which encapsulates what the LESS awards are all about. Can be designed and submitted by anyone in the school i.e. students, teachers, caretakers etc.

Competition 2: Energy Action Plan

Closing Date: 7 December 2012

Winner: €250 One4all voucher

Runner-up: €150 One4all voucher

Details: How are you planning on saving energy and reducing your costs at your school or centre? Planning is everything- your plan identifies what needs to be done in terms of activities, resources, responsibilities, timescales and control. You should also set objectives for your plan. Once you create your plan you can start taking action and save energy (and money!).

Competition 3: Energy Awareness Campaign

Closing Date: 8 February 2013

Winner: €250 One4all voucher

Runner-up: €150 One4all voucher

+ Your Poster may be chosen by SEAI for a national campaign!

Details: This competition looks at the details of how you are increasing awareness and improving energy efficient behavior at your school or centre. Working from your Energy Action plan, you should have already begun to raise awareness in your school/centre. Raising awareness helps create a culture of energy efficiency and motivates others to save energy. Also, why not design your own posters? You could organise your own internal competition and award a prize for the winning poster. Your poster could be used by Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland for their website. Designers' details will be included on poster.

Competition 4: Leading Energy Saving School

Closing Date: 19 April 2013

Winner: €500 One4all voucher

Runner-up: €300 One4all voucher

Details: This is the big one! This competition takes into account all the work done since September to reduce energy in your school or centre. The Judges will be looking at the completed actions you have taken to save energy, how much energy awareness /behavior change has improved and how much energy/kWh is saved by each school/centre.

About the Judges:

Conor Molloy – Managing Director/Owner of Authentic Energy Management Services

Conor founded Authentic Energy Management Services in 2005 and has developed and delivered a range of structured programmes to enable both public and private organisations deliver measurable energy and cost savings with low and no cost actions.

Gwen Moore- Public Sector Reform Coordinator, IVEA

Gwen has coordinated change management programmes in the VEC Sector for over 7 years, as part of National Partnership, Transforming Public Services and Public Sector Reform initiatives. Gwen also coordinated, in cooperation with Co Kildare VEC, the 2011 Better Energy in Schools project in the VEC Sector.

Enprova Representative

Enprova Ireland's Energy Circle was created to help Ireland meet its energy saving obligations under the recently published EU Directive on Energy Efficiency. The brand represents a unique collaboration between Government, Ireland's Oil Industry as represented by Irish Petroleum Industry Association (www.IPIA.ie) and local business people from communities all over the country in helping to advise, invest and implement on energy saving measures for residential, commercial and transport applications. Visit the Enprova website at www.enprova.ie

For further information, all competition details and entry forms email gwen.moore@ivea.ie

IVEA

Representing Vocational
Education Committees



Junior Cycle Education



The Minister's Proposals and What They Mean

By Pat O'Mahony, IVEA

Introduction

On 4 October 2012, Minister for Education and Skills, Ruairi Quinn TD launched a new framework for the first three years of post primary education.

The outline of the framework had been known since the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) published *Towards a framework for junior cycle – Innovation and Identity*, in November 2011. Nevertheless, there are many intimately involved with the delivery of post-primary education, who are still unsure about what exactly is being proposed and why.

Not only do many not understand what is being proposed but they wonder about why we should embark on a quite radical overhaul of the junior cycle when, in their view, the system seems to be working well. They see the curriculum as rigorous and challenging and they see the Junior Certificate examination as an independent measure of learners' achievements. They also cite evidence to the effect that relations between students and teachers in Irish post-primary schools are very good by international standards. In short, they ask: why fix what is not broken – especially at a time when the resources essential to implementing the reform successfully are so difficult to secure.

*“tell me and I'll forget,
show me and I may
remember, involve me
and I'll understand”*

Doing - the key to learning

At the outset, let me acknowledge that I have had a long-standing interest in and commitment to continuous improvement. On the death of my father, when I was in my mid-teens and the eldest of seven, my brothers and I continually explored new ways of doing things smarter and better around the farm. We looked over the fence at the way our neighbours did things and, where they seemed to be doing things better than us, we adapted their approach to suit our own circumstances. We learned,



not by taking classes but by exploring what was of interest to us and, in the process, we sometimes made mistakes and learned even more from them. For us, the old Confucian proverb: 'tell me and I'll forget, show me and I may remember, involve me and I'll understand', certainly held true. Indeed, I principally attribute my facility for problem solving to my teenage experiences on the farm.

Humankind continuously seeks improvement

There is strong evidence that, from the very beginning, humankind has continuously sought improvement in everything it does. Otherwise, how else could we have got to where we are today? In a sense, this perpetual search for ways in which we can better ourselves, both individually and collectively, seems to lie at the core of our humanity. It seems to be the 'hope' that empowers us and gives meaning to our lives; and those who lack it are considered to be emotionally dysfunctional. Cardinal Newman elegantly captures this idea: 'to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often'.

Of course, as history attests, all change is not for the better but, as is evident from the way some species thrive while others become extinct, the option of refusing to change is not available if we wish to progress rather than regress.

In education, a key driver of human progress, we simply have no option but to continuously adjust the system in response to changing circumstances.

Making the case for continuously seeking to improve our education system is not a negative reflection on what schools and teachers have done or are doing. It simply

acknowledges that we live in a world where pervasive and rapid change is the only constant in our lives.

Houses built to the highest specifications only a few short years ago can now have their warmth significantly improved by applying insulation approaches that were not available to us when they were built. Similarly, we now know ways in which the school experiences of our young people can be improved by applying approaches and technologies that were not available when the Junior Certificate was born.

The New South Wales experience

While accepting that all change does not necessarily produce positive outcomes, those countries whose young people score highest in international tests of desired learner outcomes have all changed their 12 to 15/16 curriculum and the way they assess learner achievement, both during and at the conclusion of their 12 to 15/16 education.

Significantly, it is not just recently that these countries have radically reconceptualised their 12 to 15/16 education. When I taught in New South Wales (NSW), the junior cycle curriculum was totally revised, in the mid-70s, along the lines of what is now being proposed here, and the State Examination at the end of the NSW junior cycle was abolished in favour of school-based assessment, with an independent state-wide moderation of educational standards in only English, Maths and Science.

The point here is that all this happened 35 years ago and at a time when most young Australians entered the workforce at the conclusion of their junior cycle education.

I taught in NSW both before and after its junior cycle education system was revised and I have an abiding memory of the positive change in my classroom experience following the change. Prior to the change, I felt real pressure to prepare students for examinations; and examinations were very much the focus of many parents in the inner city school where I worked. Many of these parents had not progressed up the educational ladder but they wanted their children to have the opportunities that had eluded them.

*“In NSW... the
transformation
was palpable”*

Teacher concerns proved unfounded

At the time teachers were fearful that the removal of the terminal examination would make their job more difficult, that there would be more obvious pressure to give students good grades, irrespective of merit, and that, in general, classroom management would pose a greater challenge. To some degree, they felt that the terminal examination kept the lid on the whole system. These concerns were heightened by the abolition of corporal punishment in NSW schools, in January 1976.

Our fears, however, proved unfounded and my teaching experience, between these two momentous changes and my return to Ireland in 1989, was the most positive of my whole teaching career. For the only time in my teaching career, I felt I had the time to engage with my students, and they with me, about the real-life implications of what they were learning. And yet we got our courses covered and the students that progressed to senior cycle made the transition effectively, and eventually did well in their Higher School Certificate – the equivalent of our Leaving Certificate.

The transformation was palpable. Students really engaged with the curriculum and discussions commenced in class spilled out onto the corridors and the canteen. In the years since, I often asked myself why I had not been able to replicate those experiences (experiences that I would wish for the whole teaching profession) in an Irish classroom only to conclude that the nature of both the curriculum and the terminal examination precluded such engagement.

the whole experience of a significant number of junior cycle students is far from positive

Research basis for change

Apart from my own experiences, the need to change junior cycle education is supported by a substantial body of evidence, much of it gathered through the ESRI research into students' experiences in the first three years of their post-primary education.

- A significant number of **first year students do not make progress**, especially in English and Mathematics.
- In **second year, a sizeable number** of male students, in particular, **disengage from their education** and, in a significant number of instances, they do not re-engage. For those students, educational progression has been stalled

– sometimes permanently – at a huge cost to these young people, their families and communities and, indeed, to Irish society.

- The **educational experience of junior cycle students**, especially those in third year, is **dominated by preparation for the Junior Certificate examination** and the emphasis is unavoidably on 'learning stuff' off for the examination and on rehearsing questions for the examinations. This means that time for real engagement between the teacher and his/her students is inevitably at a premium, as is time for real engagement with the syllabus and its connection to real life experiences. As well, the whole experience of a significant number of junior cycle students is far from positive and their results in the Junior Certificate simply confirms that negativity. The new framework allows schools to put in place tailored certificated programmes to meet the learning needs of students who, because of their special learning needs, cannot achieve to their potential following the mainstream programme.

The points' race... seduces all of us into overlooking the longer term needs of students

- There is considerable research evidence about the **negative impact that exclusive reliance on external examinations to assess students' learning achievement has on teaching and learning. This reliance** virtually programmes teachers and students to do what is required to achieve the best possible examination results, at the expense of meeting the real learning needs of students. Research also confirms that continuous assessment of students' progress can enhance the quality of learning outcomes across the three years of junior cycle.

How often have I heard myself answer a student's perfectly reasonable question, a question that could have catalysed real learner engagement, with something like the following? Yes, that is a very interesting question; unfortunately, we have to complete the course by a particular date to ensure that we are well prepared for the examination. Indeed, in my experience, the teacher won't stray too far from preparing for the examination would invariably be brought back on track by the body language of his/her academically ambitious students and, if

that did not have the desired effect, the parents of those students might well intervene.

Of course, we cannot blame either the students or their parents for adopting this stance. They are simply seeking to ensure that the school delivers what they feel are the desired learner outcomes – the best possible examination results. On the other hand, the available evidence suggests that good examination results are not necessarily a reliable indicator of the extent to which the school experience provides young people with the skills and competences to make the most of their unique talents; and that is the core business of the school. The points' race and all that it entails seduces all of us into overlooking the longer term needs of students and replacing them with the short term objective of examination results. This is an issue that demands urgent attention and there are proposals in place to address this.

The new framework addresses this deficiency by moving over the course of the eight-year implementation period, as the new subject syllabi come on stream, from total reliance on a terminal examination to measure student achievement to the continuous assessment of student learning. The expectation here is that this continuous assessment will ensure that students are provided with regular feedback on their progress and on how they might learn more effectively; also that teachers will use the intelligence gained through continuous assessment to inform their teaching practice.

Specifically, the proposals provide for 40% of a student's marks in any particular subject being based on continuous assessment, with the remaining 60% being based on performance in a terminal examination. All terminal examination papers will be set by the State Examination Commission but teachers will mark their own students' scripts other than in the case of English, Irish and Maths – which will still be marked externally.

- The **primary and post-primary curricula do not link seamlessly, and students commencing their post-primary education often experience real discontinuity.** Peer learning, group work, interactive learning, and the focus on each student learning at his/her own pace, all have to be curtailed and, to a significant degree, students are required to sit quietly in serried rows so that the serious work of preparing for the Junior Certificate can proceed. This is not to reflect adversely on the work

of the post primary teacher; rather the nature of the system demands such an approach. Then, maybe in second year, when teachers seek to introduce group work or other innovative teaching approaches, we wonder why it presents so much challenge.

Focus will be on students acquiring skills and applying knowledge to solve problems

- The **junior cycle curriculum is overloaded in terms of content, and this militates against the acquisition of key skills and competences.** A central plank in the new framework is the phased revision, between 2014 and 2017, of all subject syllabi and this revision will entail all syllabi being specified in terms of the outcomes envisaged for the learners. Thus, the focus will be on students acquiring skills and applying knowledge to solve problems, rather than on acquiring knowledge simply for the sake of successfully completing terminal examinations and then promptly forgetting what was learned.

Inflexibility of Curriculum

Currently all students have to follow a relatively inflexible curriculum, irrespective of their particular needs and aptitudes. What is being proposed will give schools a much greater level of freedom to design a curriculum that meets the needs of both the school and individual students. For example, only English, Irish and Maths will be compulsory and schools will otherwise be able to select the combination of subjects and short courses that most appropriately meet the learning needs of their students.

In the first instance, it is likely that many schools will rely on a combination of NCCA specified full subjects and short courses. By 2014, the NCCA will have developed the following short courses: CSPE, SPHE, PE, Digital Media Literacy, Artistic Performance, Chinese and Computer Programming/Coding. Over time, however, it is likely that schools will begin to design their own short courses in accordance with NCCA provided guidelines for such short courses. This development will facilitate schools becoming more responsive to the needs of their students and will occur as schools acquire the capacity for designing their own short courses. So there is no need for alarm about schools being thrust into doing things

that they are not ready to do.

There will, however, be no free-for-all when it comes to schools devising their own curriculum. Rather, the curriculum will have to meet clear standards set out in the framework document.

- ✓ It must comply with the eight principles that underpin the framework,
- ✓ It must manifestly equip students with the eight key skills that the framework explicitly states 'are required for successful learning across the curriculum and for learning beyond the school', and
- ✓ It must help students to know, understand, value and be able to do a range of things that are set out in the framework's 24 statements of learning.

While all of this may seem rather bewildering at first, the process is clearly set out in the framework and, assuming the Minister's commitment to resourcing the whole project appropriately is carried through, there will be ample time and opportunity (over the course of the eight years that it will take to implement the full reform programme) for schools, teachers, parents and boards of management to get to grips with what is involved in schools tailoring their curriculum to their own specific needs. That said, there is no doubt that moving from where schools are today to where the Minister's proposals envisages them being in 2020 is going to pose challenges for schools.

This reform project has had a long gestation and, while there may be disagreement about some of the detail, such as dispensing with the independent marking of examination scripts, all stakeholders accept the need for change and there is also general agreement with the broad thrust of the Minister's proposals.

At this point, it is important to see what is being proposed as the beginning of an eight-year journey to an agreed destination, though there may not be complete unanimity about the exact route that is going to be taken. Significantly, the DES has already convened a steering group (involving unions, management bodies, school leaders and parents) to tease out the details of the route collaboratively. This group's work is going to be critical to the success of junior cycle reform.

no longer any great need for students to learn-off content

Today's Content Obsolete Tomorrow

Since we live in an age where information is no further than the click of a mouse away, there is no longer any great need for students to learn off content. In any case, content that is relevant today may well be obsolete tomorrow. Instead, school leavers need the skills and competences to manage themselves, to stay well, to communicate effectively with others, to be creative in all that they do, to work with others, and to manage information and their thinking. As well, all school leavers need to have a certain level of proficiency in literacy and numeracy because without these skills, they will not be able to develop the other key skills. While the existing junior cycle programme focuses on the capacity of learners to answer questions that their teachers have prepared them to answer, the new framework for junior cycle focuses more on learners acquiring the skills to apply what they learn in the classroom to making the most of their lives in education and training, in the family, in the community, and in the workplace.

A broader range of learner achievements and dispositions will be recognised

Junior Certificate only Assesses Narrow Range of Student Achievement

The Junior Certificate examination, by its very nature, is only capable of assessing a narrow range of student achievement. Many young people do not shine in these examinations; yet, in a number of other respects, they may be very talented. This failure to shine results in both the school and examination experience leaving a negative imprint on these young people, and undermines their faith in education and training at a time when lifelong learning is critical to the whole of their life span. The new framework is intended to provide young people with the opportunity to develop the fullest range of their talents over the course of their schooling and to have all their achievements recognised in the certification and reports they acquire at the end of their junior cycle education.

While certification for what is now going to be called the School Certificate, rather than the Junior Certificate, will only document academic achievement, schools will also be required to report to parents at the conclusion of the junior cycle about a broad range of other learning experiences

– such as attendance, personal and social development, extra-curricular achievements, etc. This will mean that a broader range of learner achievements and dispositions will be recognised than is the case currently.

current system does not adequately prepare young people to be lifelong learners

Developing Lifelong Learners

It is now generally acknowledged that one of the key functions of our school system is to facilitate the development of lifelong learners – people with the capacity and inclination to go on learning, for the whole of their lives, so they may be able to adapt easily and constructively to their ever-changing environment – in the family, in the community and in the workplace. The current system does not adequately prepare young people to be lifelong learners. Rather, it gives the impression that education is more about jumping a series of ever higher hurdles (examinations) in order to get to one's chosen career. The new framework addresses this deficiency to a significant degree.

Learning from previous reform projects

In 1989, Ireland set out to do a significant amount of what we are now seeking to do, when the Junior Certificate replaced both the Group Certificate and the Intermediate Certificate. However, while the Junior Certificate did facilitate significant curricular change, it failed to deliver on much of what was envisaged around improving the student experience. Of course, in the intervening period, Irish society has changed dramatically and we now live in a knowledge society that has emerged as a consequence of technological developments that, just two decades ago, were unimaginable.

changes will be phased in over eight years

While there are differing views about why much of what was envisaged in 1989 did not materialise, there would seem to be good grounds for believing that two factors, in particular, militated against achieving what was envisaged. Firstly, the Junior Certificate was introduced in one single movement, with a new syllabus for all subjects being introduced at the same time and all in-service being confined to a relatively

short few years – so momentum was not maintained. Secondly, and probably more importantly, there was no real change to the way student achievement was assessed. The terminal high stakes examination remained the principal means of assessing student progress.

The new framework addresses the lessons learned from '89 in two ways. Firstly, the changes will be phased in over eight years, with each successive phase reinforcing the previous phase. More importantly, however, it radically changes the way student achievement will be assessed, moving from exclusive reliance on the terminal examination to an approach that relies principally on assessment for learning and on continuous assessment for accreditation purposes.

There had been an expectation that the assessment process for awarding the new School Certificate would continue to involve some kind of independently marked terminal examination or, at a minimum, that there would be independent moderation of the assessment process. But the new framework makes it clear that, as new syllabuses are introduced, other than those for English, Irish and Maths, the examination scripts will be marked by those who teach the students, though the papers will continue to be set by the State Examinations Commission (SEC) and the SEC will provide detailed marking systems to those marking the papers. In the case of English, Irish and Maths, the SEC will continue to mark these scripts, at least for the moment. Furthermore, in these three subjects the examination papers will be set at two levels but, in all other subjects, the papers will only be set at one level and it will be the responsibility of the class teachers to differentiate teaching to accommodate the different needs of learners.

While acknowledging the critical importance of continuous assessment in changing how teachers teach and students learn, dispensing completely with an externally marked examination and the absence of any kind of external moderation of school based assessment are likely to pose serious challenges. It will certainly require an urgent resourcing of continuous professional development programmes to build the capacity and confidence of teachers to assess their students in a way that will ensure that all stakeholders have confidence both in what is happening in the classroom and in the certification awarded at the end of the junior cycle education. Remember, parents currently have considerable confidence in the system and we cannot risk this being fractured.

At the launch, the Minister assured us that he would secure the resources necessary to making the implementation of the new

framework a success. Ultimately, resourcing the building of teacher capacity around assessment will, more than anything else, determine the success or failure of this reform project; and failure to grasp this reality from the very beginning will put the whole project at risk.

any reform that does not empower those charged with delivering it will fail

Teacher empowerment

The new junior cycle framework augurs well not only for students but for teachers. To a significant degree our failure to renew continually school curricula, and the way teachers teach and students learn, to take account of the seismic changes that have occurred in society over the course of the last quarter century has left our school system plagued by an inexplicable paradox. Each of the principal players in the system feels disempowered, with each player (principals, deputy principals, teachers, board of management members and students) convinced that its capacity to improve matters is circumscribed by the superior power of the other players in the system.

Everybody, the media for example, owns second-level education except those most intimately involved with it. However, if second-level education is 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.

The new framework for junior cycle, provided it is appropriately resourced by the State and wholeheartedly supported by all the education partners, has the potential to transform the work of the teacher, to make teaching a hugely rewarding professional activity, and to do so without significantly increasing the workload of teachers. It can do for today's teachers what the NSW reforms of the 70s did for my teaching. I and my teaching colleagues were, in those distant days, empowered by proposals that I must admit seemed quite alarming at the outset. There is but one certainty; any reform that does not empower those charged with delivering it will fail. This principle must inform everything we do to implement what the Minister has proposed.

www.juniorcycle.ie

Workplace Relations Reform Programme

By Niamh Ginnell, BL

Minister Richard Bruton proposes the creation of a **two-tier Workplace Relations structure** which would mean that from the end of this year two statutorily independent bodies will replace the current five bodies.



Richard Bruton, TD, Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation

1. There will be a new single body of first instance to be called the Workplace Relations Commission; and
2. A separate appeals body, which will effectively be an expanded Labour Court.

Completing these proposed reforms requires the enactment of detailed legislation to provide the statutory basis for the new structures and processes.

Reform to date:

- ▶ A new single contact portal called “Workplace Relations Customer Services” (WRC) incorporating the functions of the Labour Relations Commission (including the Rights Commissioner Service), the Equality Tribunal, the Employment Appeals Tribunal (first instance jurisdiction only) and the National Employment Rights Authority (NERA)
- ▶ Complaints are now acknowledged, on average, within **five working days** of receipt. This was previously taking up to eight months in some cases.
- ▶ The employer is also notified, on average, within five working days of the complaint being lodged thus increasing the possibility of a resolution being reached without the need for a hearing.
- ▶ There are now no backlogs for Rights Commissioner hearings. The reform will provide a just, fair and efficient adjudication service provided by well-trained, professional, impartial and fair decision-makers. It is intended to greatly reduce the waiting time for hearings and decisions by putting in place a target period of three months from the time of complaint to hearing, and written, reasoned decisions within 28 working days of the hearing

in 90% of cases. All decisions will be published and will include the reason for the decision.

- ▶ A Single Complaint Form that deals with over 100 first instance complaints has replaced the 30 forms previously in use.
- ▶ A new workplace relations interim website **www.workplacelrelations.ie** is in place.
- ▶ Delivery of a pilot Early Resolution Service has commenced.

It is proposed that:

The Labour Court will continue to deliver all of its existing services (other than the small number of first instance functions transferring to the WRC) in addition to taking on the appellate functions of the EAT. The Labour Court will hear all appeals from the Workplace Relations Commission. The Court will therefore retain its existing appellate function under both the Industrial Relations Acts 1946-2004 and a range of employment rights enactments. The Court will also acquire the current appellate jurisdiction of the Employment Appeals Tribunal. The Labour Court will act as a court of final appeal for all adjudication decisions of the WRC, subject to the right of either party to bring a further appeal from a determination of the Labour Court to the High Court on a point of law only.

It is proposed that the legislation to establish the WRC will provide comprehensively for the development of cooperation agreements between the WRC, the Labour Court and other specified official bodies to facilitate, inter alia, the exchange of relevant information between the WRC/Labour Court and specified official bodies and to minimise the duplication of activities by different official bodies. The Social Welfare (Amendment) Act 2007 provided the legislative basis for cooperation and information sharing between the National Employment Rights Authority, Revenue and the Department of Social Protection and for joint investigations by officials from each of those bodies. This proved to be of considerable benefit to all the bodies concerned in fulfilling their respective statutory enforcement remits. Certain consequential amendments of the Data Protection Acts and Freedom of Information Acts will be required to enable effective information sharing between the official bodies.

Subject to advices from the Office of the Attorney General, the Minister proposes to provide in the legislation for the use of Compliance Notices to promote higher levels of compliance with employment legislation. Such notices may issue when a Compliance Officer forms an opinion that a scheduled contravention of employment law, which the employer concerned fails or refuses to rectify, has occurred. The Compliance Notice will set out the steps the employer

concerned must take to effect compliance. An employer may appeal against all or any aspect of the notice to the Labour Court. Failure to comply with a Compliance Notice may result in the Labour Court, following a hearing, issuing a binding order. Failure to comply with such an order in turn would be a prosecutable offence.

In order to further bolster the system of compliance with employment rights, the Minister also proposes to legislate for the use of Fixed Charge Notices in respect of a specified range of acts of non-compliance on the part of employers. The matters in respect of which a fixed charge notice may be issued will be specified in a schedule to the proposed legislation.

The new system, as proposed, will be characterised by a number of key principles:

- ▶ To promote harmonious workplaces and a culture of compliance with employment law
- ▶ To reduce the number of disputes within the workplace and, where they do arise, provide assistance to resolve

them at the earliest possible date. The WRC will provide an Early Resolution Service to facilitate and encourage the resolution of individual complaints at as early a stage as possible and so obviate the need for formal adjudication or investigation, to the greatest extent possible.

- ▶ To deliver a responsive user-friendly service
- ▶ To deliver value for money for the tax payer and reduce costs for employers and employees
- ▶ To eliminate procedural overlaps and institutional confusion

The current system of enforcement of employment rights awards is cumbersome, expensive and not fit for purpose. The Minister further proposes a new and robust enforcement regime which will provide successful complainants with an accessible and inexpensive means of compelling noncompliant respondents to honour the award of the WRC Adjudication Service or of the Labour Court.



Left to right: Mary Browne (Co. Wicklow VEC), Breda Naughton(Pensions in DES), Jack Lynch (Co. Sligo VEC), Siubhan Gillespie (Co. Donegal VEC), Tina McCarthy (City of Dublin VEC) and Joan Gogan Co. Dublin VEC

Pictured above are members of the IVEA Pensions Task Group at a recent meeting where they marked the upcoming retirement of Mr. Jack Lynch who had chaired the group since its commencement.

County Galway VEC Media Students win National Award



*Left to right: - Back Row:
Teresa Kelly, Tom Reilly,
Murach MacDonncha,
Peadar MacDonnacha
(County Galway VEC)*

*Middle Row:
David G. Ward,
Richard Ward,
Niall Ward, Martin Ward*

*Front Row:
Paddy Ward, Lauren Ward,
Rosaleen Rimmington and
Siobhan Ward*

Students of Co Galway VEC's Media Centre and the Western Traveller Youth Project scooped the overall Spirit Award at the recent Let's Talk About Drugs Media Awards in Dublin.

'Choice' is a short drama which looks at the dilemma facing a teenage boy as he struggles to decide if he should take drugs, like many of his friends. The film was made by the members of the Western Youth Traveller Project in Tuam with County Galway VEC's Media Centre as part of a Back To Education Initiative.

Presented by Minister of State Róisín Shortall TD, the awards were established to encourage the journalists, writers, filmmakers and animators of tomorrow to talk about drug and alcohol issues in Ireland today. The Awards are aimed at primary and secondary school students, college students and aspiring members of the media, to stimulate debate around the drugs and alcohol issue in Irish communities.

Western Traveller Youth Project developed an information leaflet in 2011 highlighting the issues facing young people in the west of Ireland regarding drug and alcohol use. As part of their TV & Video Production course with County Galway VEC they developed this into a short drama entitled 'Choice'. The entry won the overall Spirit Award at the event for the positive outlook and vision that the project displayed.

Commenting on the project, Eithne Nic Dhonnchadha, Adult Education Officer with Co Galway VEC said, "Back To Education Initiatives allow students to participate in some very exciting educational programmes. Our media courses in particular allow students to develop the technical skills required for film and television work as well as allowing them to explore issues of national and inter-global importance such as the use of drugs and alcohol among young people. The students were given the opportunity to address this issue in a way that was relevant and meaningful to them whilst at the same time being very creative and skilful."

The video can be viewed at:

www.drugs.ie/features/feature/lets_talk_about_drugs_national_media_awards_2012_winners

County Cavan VEC and County Louth VEC stage National ICT Seminar on 'Teaching and Learning in the e-School'



COUNTY CAVAN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION COMMITTEE
COISTE GAIRMOIDEACHAIS CHONTAE AN CHABHÁIN



Coiste County Louth
Gairmoideachais Vocational Education
Chontae Lú Committee



John Kearney, Co. Cavan V.E.C., Colm McEvoy, CEO. of Co. Cavan VEC and Paul Rellis, MD of Microsoft Ireland meet with Brian Geraghty, Tara Collins and Ciara McDonald, students of St. Bricin's College Belturbet, at the Education Seminar on Teaching and Learning in the e-School

Co. Cavan VEC and Co. Louth VEC recently co-hosted the inaugural National ICT Seminar entitled 'Teaching and Learning in the e-School'. Personal computing in the classroom and the challenges that schools encounter in integrating the technology in teaching and learning formed the guiding theme of this Seminar. The event showcased the best of ICT in education practice in Ireland and abroad and helped create a forum for schools to learn from their experiences of operating personal IT devices in their classrooms.

The event was opened by Paul Rellis, Managing Director of Microsoft Ireland and Chair of the Department of Education and Skills' ICT in Schools Joint Advisory Group. Mr. Rellis's presentation, a thought-provoking address on the potential of

ICT in enhancing the future provision of education, was timely as more and more schools begin replacing traditional books with IT devices and tablet PCs. Other speakers included Noel Malone and Ger O'Sullivan, Principal and Deputy-Principal respectively of Coláiste Chiaráin in Limerick, whose students have been using laptop devices for over 10 years. Ciarán Folan from Co. Galway VEC gave an overview their IT Project that coordinates e-books being used in all of the VECs 12 post-primary schools.

The seminar also featured St. Bricin's College in Cavan and St. Fintina's College in Meath. Both schools are part of the Department's e-book pilot project. Instructional features and the ability to create digital content with iPads were discussed by Ian Mulcahy of Coláiste Choilm, Cork, while John Henney of Co. Louth VEC described the development of Professional Development Programmes for schools who are utilising 1:1 deployments.

Abdul Chohan, Director of Essa Academy in Bolton, UK, provided an international dimension to the proceedings. Essa Academy is internationally recognised as a centre of best practice in relation to the integration of ICT into teaching and learning. Abdul demonstrated how his school initiated this transformation by using iPod Touch devices and redesigning the teaching and learning approaches to meet the specific needs of students. Essa Academy succeeded in using technology to transform student achievement and last year accomplished the extraordinary feat of 100% of students successfully attain 5 GCSE C-grades or higher. The school has been widely acknowledged for its work in leading educational change through technology.

A team of 14 ICT teachers from Hungary attended the event as part of a European Comenius Regio Exchange Project between Co. Cavan VEC and the Hungarian region of Orosháza. The teachers learned from the experiences of Irish schools in relation to e-learning and provided attendees with the opportunity to hear about similar developments in Hungarian schools.

In excess of 200 delegates attended the seminar from all over the country. A number of third-level colleges and institutes were represented on the day, as well as representatives from the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills, ICT Policy Unit in the Department of Education and Skills, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, the National Centre for Technology in Education and the National ICT Steering Group.

While the event saw speakers repeatedly emphasise the importance of planning for the integration of student personal IT devices, the speakers also provided details of a number of different models of implementation that reflected the individual nature and context of schools and VECs. The event witnessed calls for the development of creative and individualised e-content for students. The seminar reflected the shift that is happening in Irish education and the changing landscape in which schools and students now operate.

St. Ailbe's of Tipperary Town crowned Formula 1 National Champions for a fourth time



Left to right:
Megan Cleary,
Sinead Cummins,
Gerard Barlow,
Deirbhle Hennessy,
Maeve O'Gorman

St. Ailbe's track record in this competition during previous years has been exceptional; winning the National Championships in 4 out of 5 attempts and finishing 6th in the 2010 World Finals which were held in Singapore.

Recently, 23 teams from all over Ireland gathered at Griffith College, Dublin to battle for the title of Formula 1 in Schools National Championship 2012. The finalists were whittled down from 150 participating schools who began working on this project in October 2011.

After an exhausting day of presentations, racing and scrutineering, "Team Quasar", consisting of 4th year and 5th year students, Sinead Cummins, Megan Cleary, Deirbhle Hennessy, Gerard Barlow and Maeve O'Gorman (mentored by teachers Mr. Michael Quirke and Mr. Sean Fitzpatrick) were announced Formula 1 in Schools National Champions for 2012.

The competition provides an exciting yet challenging educational experience through the magnetic appeal of Formula One. Its main objective is to help change perceptions of engineering, science and technology by creating a fun and exciting learning environment for young people to develop an informed view about careers in engineering, Formula One, science, marketing and technology.

Students are required to deploy CAD/CAM software to collaborate, design, analyse, manufacture, test, and then race miniature gas-powered balsa wood F1 cars. The challenge inspires students to use IT to learn about physics, aerodynamics, design, manufacture, branding, graphics, sponsorship, marketing, leadership/teamwork, media skills and financial strategy, and apply them in a practical, imaginative, competitive and exciting way.

"Team Quasar", will now be travelling to Kuala Lumpur, Asia from 26th October 2012 to 4th November, 2012 representing Ireland in the upcoming Formula 1 in Schools World Finals.

New CEEOA President elected

Paddy Lavelle, Chief Executive Officer, County Waterford VEC was recently elected to the position of President of the Association of Chief Executive Officers and Education Officers (CEEOA).



Paddy has been CEO of County Waterford VEC since 2001. Prior to that he had worked as Principal in St Louis Community School, Kiltimagh, Co. Mayo. He completed teacher training in Mater Dei Institute before teaching in Edenderry with Co. Offaly VEC. He taught in Grenada, West Indies and Kenya where he was Headmaster of a rural boarding school. Paddy is currently studying for a PhD in UCC where his thesis focuses on planning in VECs from the perspective of CEOs.

He has served as Joint-Treasurer for IVEA for a number of years and has had roles with CEEOA in relation to Youthreach and Finance.

The outgoing President, Fiona Hartley, has been appointed Executive Director (Designate) SOLAS and is currently with FÁS until SOLAS is statutorily established. The sector's loss is SOLAS's gain!

A Note to Parents



By Jackie O Callaghan, President, National Parents Association for Vocational Schools and Community Colleges (NPAVSCC)



As with everything in life at the minute, the world of education is changing on a daily basis. The economy, departmental budgets, financial constraints dictate the amount of money that determines the education budget. This should not be so in the ideal world, but that is not where we are at, or indeed where we live. I believe that at all times investment in education is a guarantee of the future of an economy and a country. However, we do not live in an economy, we live in a society, one where the future of our society should be governed by investment in people by people and for people.

The most important person in our education system is not the current, or any Minister, not the civil servant, not the management bodies, the unions or anyone else. It is the student. Followed closely behind the student is the parent. Every parent in this and any other country not only has the right to be involved in the policy making and formation of the system that formally educates their child, but has a moral obligation to be cognisant of the policy decisions which influence their child's future.

It is in that vein that I am writing this piece. At the moment each VEC as it now exists has two Parents' Representatives on its board. That gives capacity until 2014 of sixty-six Parents Reps in the country. To date, despite trying twice already, there are only fifty-four. We have a shortfall of twelve. We now have an opportunity to fill these gaps with a date being put aside in November for the nomination and election of parents to the areas which are currently vacant.

The area's that have a vacancy at the moment are;

City of Cork (female), Cork County (male), Dublin City vacant x 2, Dun Laoghaire vacant x 2, Kildare (female), Mayo (female), Waterford County (male), Waterford City (male)

On November 9 the parents of those areas have the opportunity to fill these vacant places. I am appealing not only to parents, but to the CEOs to assist in ensuring that these places are filled.

You can make a difference, it is imperative that in a time of huge uncertainty that we, the parents of this country exercise our right, but more importantly exercise our duty to our children to ensure the education of not just the current students, but the future students of this country as well.

Please put yourself out there for this. Do not assume that someone else will do it. Enquire at your school or local VEC office.

The parent voice has the potential to be a booming voice. It is now time to have our voice heard.

IVEA
A History of
the Irish
Vocational
Education
Association
1902 - 2002

Jim Cooke

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

Laois students celebrate exam achievements

Sixteen very happy students collected their Leaving Certificate results in Co. Laois VEC Adult Learning Centre. This year the age profile went from 19 years of age to 60+ for those sitting the exam.

There was also great excitement at the Adult Learning Centre in September when adult learners celebrated their recent success in achieving their Junior Certificate results in English and Mathematics. A total of 26 students achieved their Junior Certificates attending classes on a part-time basis over the course of a year.

It is never easy sitting an exam but returning to education as an adult and taking on an exam subject can be particularly daunting. "It is a wonderful achievement that reflects all the hard work and commitment from students throughout the year," said Junior Certificate tutor Deirdre Brennan.



Students from the Laois VEC Adult Learning Centre who received their Junior Certificate in English and Mathematics:

Left to right: Back row - Bernie Kelly (Tutor), Rita Killeen, Frank Gallaher, Colm Doherty, Marta Coss, Marian Kennelly, Martin Cullen, Phil Fallon, Frances Hogan, Michael Ryan, Maura Brophy, Deirdre Brennan (Tutor), Bridget Dowling, Michael Hopkins

Front row: Sean Kelly, Dale Lee, Aisling Fitzpatrick, Jamie Lee King, Pat Noonan

Co. Carlow VEC meet at IVEA Training and Research Centre



Co. Carlow VEC at their recent meeting in IVEA HQ, Piper's Hill

County Carlow VEC held their July meeting at the IVEA headquarters in Piper's Hill. Committee members along with the CEO, Ms Cynthia Deane were delighted to receive the kind invitation from the General Secretary, Mr. Michael Moriarty to hold the meeting in the spacious and elegant new building.

Members were charmed by the staff, the warm welcome received and their tour of the building. The overall experience enhanced a successful meeting. Compliments were expressed on the contemporary facilities which are on offer in Piper's Hill to support the work of VECs at this important time of transition.

A Presidential Time for Youthreach Galway City



At the end of May 2012 eleven students from Youthreach Galway City completed the final task in achieving their Gaisce Awards. The boys' expedition took them to Clifden where they cycled around Connemara before heading to Inishboffin for the night and their cooking challenge. The girls cycled the Green Way in Mayo from Newport to Mulranny then off to Achill Island, staying at the Valley House Hostel where they undertook their cooking challenge.

In June six students from the Centre headed to Áras an Uachtaráin to participate in President Higgins' "Being Young And Irish" consultation. The staff and students were also invited to a Garden Party by the President, which provided a relaxing conclusion to the day.



Left to right: Dermot Stokes, Former National Coordinator of Youthreach, President Higgins, Youthreach Galway City Youthreach students, Frankie Kyne and Oisín Murray



Outdoor Education Ireland (OEI)



By Michelle Forrester, Chairperson, Outdoor Education Ireland



Outdoor Education Ireland Chairperson, Michelle Forrester pictured making a presentation to IVEA General Secretary, Michael Moriarty at a recent meeting in IVEA Training and Research Centre

Outdoor Education Ireland is the national network for the 12 VEC Outdoor Education Centres which were all set up as VEC initiatives over the years. Supported by the Department of Education and Skills through our local Vocational Education Committee, OEI provide an Outdoor Education service to schools, colleges and youth services in addition to a range of adventure sports and related courses for youths and adults.

What is Outdoor Education?

Outdoor Education is a means of curriculum enrichment, whereby the process of learning takes place out of doors. Outdoor Education broadly includes environmental education, conservation education, adventure education, camping and wilderness therapy and outdoor recreation. It can be associated with many aspects of the curriculum including physical education, science, mathematics, social studies, ecology and the arts. In other words, Outdoor Education gives depth and meaning to the curriculum. It enables students and teachers to interact in an environment free from the limitations of the classroom.

Why choose an OEI Centre?

The VEC Outdoor Education Centres provide a very personal experience focusing on positive personal development and enhancement of life skills. Our Outdoor Centres aim to provide the student with an enjoyable and memorable experience to last a lifetime and create a desire to make outdoor recreation a lifestyle.



They operate to the highest operational standards with highly qualified and experienced staff.

The aim of Outdoor Education Ireland is to continue to promote the value of true Outdoor Education and to provide Outdoor Education experiences that go beyond the visitor's expectations.



Outdoor Education Centre	County
Achill OEC www.achilloutdoor.com	Mayo
Baltinglass OEC www.baltinglassoec.com	Wicklow
Birr OEC www.oei.ie/birr	Offaly
Burren OEC www.burrenoec.com	Clare
Cappanalea OEC www.cappanalea.ie	Kerry
Gartan OEC www.gartan.com	Donegal
Kinsale OEC www.kinsaleoutdoors.com	Cork
Kilfinane OEC www.kilfinaneoei.com	Limerick
Petersburg OEC www.petersburg.ie	Galway
Schull OEC www.schullsailing.ie	West Cork
Shielbaggan OEC www.shielbagganoec.com	Wexford
Tanagh OEC www.tanaghoutdoorededucation.com	Monaghan

For full information on all our centres log on to **www.oei.ie**

The JCSP Regional Writer in Residence Initiative in KES Schools



Prize Winner of JCSP National Titanic competition, Lucy Falvey, Listowel CC

The previously successful JCSP “Regional Writer in Residence” initiative ran again with much success in Kerry Education Service (KES) second-level schools during 2011/2012. This was a collaborative project involving the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), KES and Poetry Ireland Writers in Schools Scheme and Kerry Library.

The initiative provided opportunities for Junior Cycle students in KES schools to participate in a series of creative writing workshops where, working alongside a professional writer, they learned how to plan, draft, compose and edit a piece of their own writing.

The focus in phase one of the initiative was to provide opportunities for students to work with one author in the students’ own classroom over a period of several weeks. In phase two, the students were given the opportunities to progress to Master Classes and to work with several authors over the course of a single day. The Master Classes also gave students the opportunity to meet with students from other KES schools who were also participating in the creative writing initiative. At the conclusion of the initiative, each participating student had successfully produced some creative written work.

All stories / poetry submitted by KES students are available on <http://www.cokerryed.ie/>

Lucy Falvey of Listowel CC won an individual prize in the JCSP National Titanic competition. Her story is about a girl called Helen Newsom who sailed on the Titanic with her parents. She planned to meet her fiancé, Karl, on the ship when they docked in Cherbourg, France. When her mother and step-father, who did not accept Karl, found out he was on the ship they locked Helen in her cabin. Then tragedy struck when the Titanic began to sink. This could have meant death for Helen but fortunately, Karl came to the rescue and the story ended well for all of them.

Naas Youthreach project with Kerdiffstown House, St Vincent de Paul holiday home



This volunteer project was organised within the Special Educational Needs (SEN) programme and aimed to alter the perceptions of young people towards the elderly in their communities. It also sought to create a space for the elderly to share their historical stories, music, creativity and laughter deriving from a long and varied life, with our young Youthreach students who are at the beginning of life's journey.

Each guest was paired with a student who took responsibility for looking after them for the day. They worked together in painting, music and photography workshops and then socialised over the sharing of a meal. The students presented each guest with a CD of them performing during the music workshop, their finished painting, a bird feeder and seeds to take home with them. Each feeder was inscribed with the name of the elderly person by their paired student.

The students also took their guests bowling and arranged a portrait photo shoot for them in the centre and these photos were presented to them by their student friend in Kerdiffstown House. The guests also spent time with the students teaching them how to crochet, knit and play lawn bowls.

Another element of the project involved Youthreach students bringing to Kerdiffstown House a selection of woodcraft items made by them, including plant holders, window boxes and a variety of garden accessories. They worked alongside the guests potting plants, window boxes and a range of other plant item for indoor and outdoor use.

Louise - student: It was one of the best experiences I've ever had. It was lovely to work with older people. You can learn a lot from them. I found something I would love to be involved with after Youthreach.



Christina - guest: I was very impressed by the age difference and communication between the young people and us.

Eileen - guest: This project has been the best thing since sliced bread. I hope it continues. Thanks to everyone, I hope you enjoyed your time with us. You did us proud. Keep up the good work.

County Meath VEC Scholars Honoured



Two students with 625 points were among the many who attended the County Meath VEC academic awards ceremony recently. They were Conor Hughes from Ratoath College and Sinéad Cornyn from St. Peter's College, Dunboyne.

There was a great turnout for 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. A very well-attended awards ceremony in the VEC's Head Office saw students receive beautiful specially engraved cut-glass awards marking their special achievements.

School Principals made short speeches of commendation for each student. They spoke of the contribution the students had made to their schools and how they excelled not only in academics but also on the sportsfield, in voluntary activity and as colleagues with their fellow students.

Parents, teachers, school Principals and most of all the students themselves were complimented on their outstanding achievement. CEO, Mr. Peter Kierans said that "results of this nature can only be achieved by the combination of hard work by students, exceptional teaching skills by teachers, support from family and active and visionary leadership by the outstanding school Principals who now lead the nine schools of County Meath VEC".



Back row: (l to r) Mr. Peter Kierans, CEO, County Meath VEC, Ms. Ciara Balfe, Youthreach Ashbourne, Ms. Catriona Kennedy, Dunshaughlin Community College, Dylan Farrelly, Beaufort College, Antons Veselovs, Beaufort College, Stephen Markey, VTOS, Pamela Hourigan, St. Oliver Post Primary School, Oldcastle, Niamh Corrigan, Ratoath College, Kevin Reynolds, Dunshaughlin Community College

Front Row (l to r) Charlotte Marlowe and Lauren Marlowe, Ratoath College, Shauna Monahan, St. Peter's College, Dunboyne, Conor Hughes, Ratoath College, Nicola Lynch, O' Carolan College, Nobber, Rachel Ennis, St. Fintina's Post Primary School, Longwood, Brian Coyle, St. Oliver Post Primary School, Oldcastle, Sinéad Cornyn, St. Peter's College, Dunboyne, Jack Carolan, St. Peter's College, Dunboyne, Daniel Duffy, Community College Dunshaughlin.

Missing from the picture is Thomas McGrath, O' Carolan College, Nobber, Daria Dlubala, Beaufort College and Sean Dalton, St. Fintina's Post Primary School, Longwood.

Passing of MaryAnn Kane, CEO, Co Donegal VEC

IVEA, Co Donegal VEC and other parts of the VEC Sector were saddened by the sad and untimely death of Co Donegal VEC's Acting Chief Executive Officer, MaryAnn Kane.

Sympathy is extended to MaryAnn's family and friends particularly her children, Alice, Emma, Edward and Roslynn and to all her VEC colleagues throughout the organisation.

Representatives from each part of Co Donegal VEC: staff, students and parents from the schools and adult and further education service, members of Boards of Management, The Music Partnership, VEC Committee, Gartan Outdoor Education Centre and Administrative Office staff, gathered at a Special Mass held in St Eunan's Cathedral, Letterkenny in September to honour and celebrate the life of MaryAnn. Representatives from IVEA and VECs throughout the country were also present.

Ms Anne McHugh, Education Development Officer at Donegal VEC stated that;

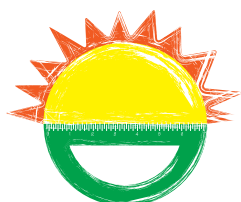
MaryAnn's 32 years of service with Co Donegal VEC were underpinned by her interest in education at all levels in general and in her ability to get things done, in particular.

First and foremost she was a teacher and she taught Maths and Commerce for 16 years at the Abbey Vocational School. She was Deputy Principal for 5 years and Principal for 5 years also at the Abbey and this was followed by 3.5 years as Education Officer and finally Acting CEO until her untimely death on 2nd August. In all these roles MaryAnn always had an appropriate, sensible and positive response to any issue put before her.

Her great interest in the ideals and philosophy of Restorative Justice only served to highlight that sense of positivity. MaryAnn also had a real and genuine interest in the Instructional Leadership Programme which promotes and enhances learning and teaching repertoires and she was an active member of the national Steering Committee.

MaryAnn is very much missed by all her colleagues at Donegal VEC and by the wider VEC community both locally and at national level. She always looked at how things could be better and she was much admired by all who knew her for that perspective.

"What we have done for ourselves alone dies with us; what we have done for others and the world remains and is immortal."
(Albert Pike)



Community
National Schools

www.cns.ie

A Community National School is one where:

- ✓ The school becomes a centre of the local community
- ✓ Children are encouraged and supported in living their lives to the full
- ✓ High standards are the goal in teaching and learning
- ✓ Everybody is valued and treated with respect
- ✓ Diversity is recognised and celebrated
- ✓ Respect for plurality of faiths is seen as integral to the daily routine of the school



For bookings contact IVEA

www.ivea.ie

Irish Vocational Education Association
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: support@ivea.ie

IVEA

Representing Vocational
Education Committees