

Leader

"A bluebell wood takes much longer than our time on earth to get to this carpet of bloom. It is precious and ancient and magical. And it arrives like clockwork, if left alone, casting a charm on so many open hearts. Here since the ice age, the bluebell takes five whole years to grow from seed to bulb. A labour of slow and perfect growth"

Dara McAnulty

Diary of a Young Naturalist



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FROM THE EDITOR



We again run a feature on Leaving Cert memories, where we invite people to take us on a trip down their memory lane. We are grateful to Ian Robertson, Patricia Mannix McNamara, David Andrews, Maedhbh Uí Chiagáin, Linda Hogan and John Quinn.

It is perhaps invidious to select one for further attention but I trust the other five will understand if I shine a light on the contribution of John Quinn to Irish education over many years. It may be hackneyed but, in every way, John is a national treasure.

His contribution through the RTÉ *The Open Mind* programme broadcast in the 1980s and 1990s may be better known to an older generation. His lilting, sonorous voice is not easily

forgotten; nor will his bequeathed trove be.

John is a prodigious author. In his 2023 book *Homage*, he pays homage to fifty well known people from the Arts, Business, Science and Economics he had interviewed over 27 years in broadcasting. You'll get to personally encounter Heaney, Hume, Binchy, McGahern, Coolahan, Chomsky and a raft of others.

Tom Collins, in the introduction to *Curious Minds* (2009), based on the radio programme, said that that "it is deeply ironic that so many of the thinkers and ideas which are captured in this hugely eclectic collection would have been considered by many in Irish education, when they were first heard on the radio, to be interesting but not practical. By drawing attention to alternate views and alternative ways of doing things, it shone a light on the conventional, focusing on its shortcomings and forcing it to justify its positions and assumptions".

Is this not what education is about? School leaders could profitably ensure that John's opus is re-discovered in our classrooms.

(An aside: many schools tie themselves in knots crafting all-embracing mission and vision statements. John might suggest no need; just three words - "Building Curious Minds".)

When you have forty minutes to spare, use the link in the article to delight in John's RTÉ *Ballyfin - A Boarding School Memory*. It's rich social history - study halls, dormitories, playing fields, Ronnie Delaney's gold in Melbourne, John Ateyo's last minute equaliser in Dalymount, the Munich air disaster, Buddy Holly, much more and, of course, his Leaving Cert.

We have an article, supported by extensive research, on the experiences of Travellers in our education system. Many will have seen the recent RTÉ documentary about 12-year-old Patrick McDonagh. Patrick had been a happy child; it was only when his parents found him dead in his bedroom, having taken his life, that the bullying was uncovered.

The article references research providing evidence of racism against Travellers. Michael O'Flaherty, the Council of Europe's Human Rights Commissioner, in recent days concurred - "making racist remarks about Travellers is still viewed as 'acceptable' in Ireland. People who do so are not being pulled up by others". It behoves all of us education leaders to speak respectfully of Travellers on - and off - task in our interactions.

If those, in all walks, who speak ill of Travellers had been born to walk in Patrick's shoes, might they view things differently? Uachtarán Michael D Higgins recommended that this documentary be shown in all schools. Better still, have it brought to a wider audience.

Can I join the NAPD family in congratulating Ger O'Sullivan, former Executive member, on the outstanding achievement of his school winning the NAPD-sponsored best school award at this year's Young Scientist Exhibition and his son Seán winning the individual award.

With space running out, there's time only to thank all contributors, without whom there would be no publication. There's much in this edition to engage with and reflect on.

When my predecessor, Jack Griffin, was handing over to me in 2004, as he left his office, now mine, he pinned four large-font words to the noticeboard over my desk - "*Damage Limitation, Self Preservation*". The first two, to do with others (the usual suspects), was immediately obvious. The latter took a bit longer. It was about me looking out for myself.

When summer comes, stretch the time spent away from the school for as long as you can. Do look out for yourself. Take the long break you need and deserve.

Barry O'Callaghan

Leader

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Back Cover
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Co. Sligo



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Presidential Musings

Regina Butler
President



I sincerely hope that you all had a relaxing Easter break and that the Leaving Certificate Oral examinations went well for your students. The addition by the SEC of personnel to support students during this potentially stressful time is to be highly commended. It may even further encourage previously hesitant staff, in some schools, to consider the role of Examinations Aide, which some saw, prior to this addition, as a solitary and onerous position for one person.

Working well, this hopefully saw all Deputies and Principals taking the Easter holiday break they needed to provide them with the necessary rest and resilience to face the final term and accomplish all that needs to be completed before the end of the final school term and throughout the scheduled state exam period in June.

During the NAPD Symposium in January with our invited guest and keynote speaker, Pasi Sahlberg, we investigated the theme of "*Reimagining Leadership for Effective schools*". During his presentation he said that on a world-wide level,

Each student in each school deserves to feel that their school is the best school, with staff in each school doing their very best to give the best to the students in their care.

statistics showed that students at second level are disconnected from their schools; they don't see the connection of school with the lives they currently lead.

Those present, especially the Principals and Deputy Principals, reacted in disaccord. We feel that our students have an affiliation and sense of esprit de corps with their school. This is particularly palpable when tournaments/leagues and finals of some present themselves. This passion and link to each school's heritage and traditions is something our students prize because it makes a difference to them. Each student in each school deserves to feel that their school is the best school, with staff in each school doing their very best to give the best to the students in their care.

He also quoted alarming statistics from his research into second level students in Australia regarding the time students spend on their mobile devices during their own personal time and late into the night. This, he said has a direct impact on their ability to "show up" to school in an educationally productive way the following day.

He suggested this is a worldwide phenomenon which needs attention. We have ourselves also seen the increase of such behaviour and additional negative effects regarding cyber bullying and intimidation of fellow classmates - and at times school personnel. Hence the proactive stance which had already been initiated by NAPD in engaging the services of Riskeye to assist and support Principals and Deputy Principals in the additional burden of dealing with such complex and noxious consequences for students and staff, thereby ensuring the Online Reputational Security of all, in an effective and timely fashion.

Having availed of this service myself, for our school, it provided immediate relief for the parents and students concerned and acted as a deterrent for further negative

There is no doubt but that the job of Principal and Deputy Principal has very positive moments, such as when everything is running well and most importantly when we see the difference we make on an individual and collective level.

online Interactions. This also allowed us all to focus on the most important business of school being effective teaching and learning.

This brings me to the central question for us as educational leaders in our schools, that of Sustainable Leadership in an ever-increasing environment of "Role Creep". The most immediate example of this is the Organisation & Management of "The Free Book Scheme" recently announced by the Minister for Education, Norma Foley.

While we all agree it is a very welcome initiative, the timing, lack of structure and thought for its effective implementation at one of the busiest times of the academic year, is baffling. During the recent radio interview of NAPD Director, Paul Crone, on the issue even Claire Byrne asked him was there no one else who could run this process. It is incredulous to think that Principals and Deputy Principals in the C&C and Voluntary Secondary Sectors now have to up-skill on issues re barcoding of books etc without due cognisance of the complexity of the job we do daily.

And that's when you don't have the potential additions of HR/IR issues, student behavioural issues with Section 29 processes required and/or a building program. The latter should bring a smile to any Principal's and Deputy Principal's face. A colleague told me it almost caused him his marriage as the time involved, after all the other daily duties of the job, as it meant that he rarely got home at a reasonable time or to have down time with his family.

As a consequence of this work overload, he suffered exhaustion and his general health also disimproved. Staff, who have the potential to lead and take on the roles of senior management, see this clearly and choose not to apply for the jobs of Principal and Deputy Principal. This is a huge concern, which NAPD has been at the forefront in highlighting at every possible occasion in its dealings with all education partners.

It truly deserves everyone's attention, just as was given to the COVID crisis, to collectively find a sustainable solution

which will ensure the most positive outcomes for all who work and learn in our schools going forward.

In this regard we trust OIDE, in its roll out of the New Leaving Certificate Programme, to ensure timely and effective support to Leaders in their schools and consequently to teachers, parents and students alike.

There is no doubt but that the job of Principal and Deputy Principal has very positive moments, such as when everything is running well and most importantly when we see the difference we make on an individual and collective level. Our support for one another is an essential part of helping us all to operate well.

In this regard, my sincere thanks to all the Regional Committees for their hard work coordinating the NAPD Meitheals, which covered Inservice topics of relevance and provided important networking opportunities for attendees which help to reduce the isolationist feelings at Senior Management level.

These opportunities and collegial links enable us also when we are leading effective Teaching and Learning in our schools. This increases student retention levels and has consequential better outcomes for society in general. The lack of time to lead teaching and learning is being felt by school leaders across Europe.

For this reason, ESHA, the European School Heads Association, has accepted Apple's offer to run a Leadership Series for Senior School leaders across Europe, to help us to navigate, plan current, and anticipate future, requirements of our education systems. The first in the series began in February and saw more than 3,000 leaders participating across Europe on the important theme of "Leading Change".

There will be a report on the Leadership Series in the Autumn Leader.

Session 3 in the series on a "Vision for Teaching and Learning with Technology" took place recently. Reminders of all further sessions will be issued on the NAPD App. We hope they will be of value to you in the effective management of your school.

Let us begin this final term "with the end in mind", which Stephen Covey advises is a key skill of highly effective people. The end being the happy thoughts of a relaxing summer break which reinvigorates us in body, mind and soul.

With every best wish in your important daily work until the summer break,

Regina Butler, President

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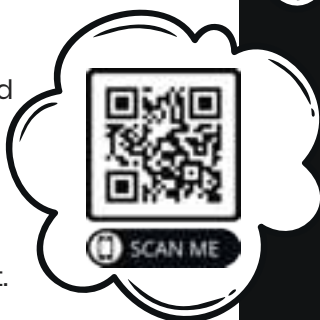
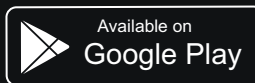
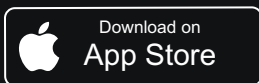
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DIRECTOR'S DESK



PAUL
CRONE

We very often have to look back in order to look forward, we must see where we have come from to determine our best path forward. When we look back to 1924, we can see the bedrock of our current system taking shape. 100 years ago, secondary schools were largely under religious management and continued to thrive from the foundation of the state in 1922.

The Intermediate and Leaving Certificates were introduced in 1924. The Intermediate Certificate continued until 1992 and the Leaving Certificate continues to this day. The Intermediate Education Act of 1878 had already substituted capitation payments for payment by results.

Our secondary schools, in 1924, continued to be vested in either religious orders, diocesan authorities, governors or other parties. The State had little to no role in the provision of schools. Provision was made in 1924 for the payment of capital grants for each recognised student while students also paid a contribution to the school for their attendance.

Schools back then were simple places by comparison with the modern school. Modern schools are seen as public bodies that have responsibilities accounting for

the expenditure of public money, they must comply with the requirements of the charity's governance code, the Health and Safety authority have definite requirements in relation to plant management and the operation of the physical infrastructure; there is substantial legislation pertaining to employment and extensive other legislation that impacts of the modern school.

These additional requirements and responsibilities by extension impact on the role of the modern-day school Principal in 2024.

As school leaders we go to great lengths to try to enhance the student experience in our schools, we focus on student outcomes and we prioritise relationships as the cornerstone of our school. Yet there is a growing concern that we are being dragged away from our core purpose to satisfy the compliance and administration requirements.

The announcement of the School Book Scheme for Junior Cycle students is an excellent example of this and how such a positive scheme for our students, parents and system can have such a negative impact on school leaders. Every school leader I have spoken with has been fully supportive of the extension of this scheme to Junior Cycle students; yet two questions have emerged as we move closer to the implementation of this scheme:

- 1. Capacity** School Leaders are involved in every aspect of their school and in every initiative that are all of vital importance. School attendance initiatives, mental health supports, Senior Cycle redevelopment, Junior Cycle to name but a few. The capacity does not exist within schools to continually absorb new initiatives. Something must be taken off the table before anything new can be added.
- 2. Expertise.** School leaders are not financial and procurement experts. They are not human resource experts; they are not plant management specialists and they are not professional administrators. They are, in fact, education experts who

have been thrust into a foreign world of which they have no experience or specific expertise.

As we prepare for the lifespan of the current government to come to an end, NAPD, on your behalf, are preparing another budget submission. A submission that will strongly articulate the need for specialist administrative support that is needed in each school to support our school leaders. Of course, we also need Deputy Principals, in particular for our smaller schools who do not have a full-time Deputy, we need a Special Education Needs Coordinator and we need additional posts of Responsibility. We need a culture of distributed leadership and a collective responsibility and accountability. We must, however, prioritise as we can't have everything at once.

To this end, we must develop a school leadership workforce plan that will make school leadership sustainable into the future. We need all stakeholders involved in the process of delivering the school leadership workforce plan. There is, however, an urgency to stop talking about it and deliver on the ground for school leaders in the lifespan of this current government. We will continue to pursue this for our members

We have recently sent you out a membership services survey and I want to thank you for completing it. We are working hard to deliver the most relevant and topical services to you and we see this as our number one priority. We are continuing to represent the voice of school leaders on all issues that are impacting on their role and their schools. We urge you to keep in touch with us to let us know what is happening in your school and to see how we can help you.

As another school year draws to a close, there is time to reflect, reflect where our system was 100 years ago, reflect on how schools and school leadership has evolved over the last few years and reflect on where we want it to go. Let us go on this journey together and together we will create the role of the school leader for future generations.

I thank you for your continued support and I look forward to engaging with you at our regional meetings.

Ar aghaidh le Chéile

Paul Crone, Director

DEPUTY DIRECTOR RACHEL O'CONNOR



Reflecting on a Year of Growth and Support: A Deputy Director's Perspective

As I reflect on my first year in my new role as Deputy Director of our Association, it's encouraging to see how much progress we've made in enhancing support for our members and advocating for your needs. In these positions we are building on the good work of others! Stepping into this position, my focus has been on introducing new supports, strengthening existing ones and ensuring that school leaders feel empowered and valued in your roles. A massive thanks to all of those who have served and serve our Association on behalf of our members.

Building strong relationships with our members is essential for understanding your concerns and priorities. Over the past year, I've made it a priority to meet with members both in your schools and at regional meetings.

1. INTRODUCING NEW SUPPORTS AND DEVELOPING CURRENT ONES

One of my primary goals has been to identify areas where our members need additional support and to develop targeted initiatives to address these needs. Whether it's providing resources for mental health and well-being, offering guidance on school management practices or facilitating networking opportunities, our aim is to equip School Leaders with the tools and support you need to thrive in their roles.

The introduction of RISKEYE - Online Reputational Security has helped dozens and dozens of School Leaders across the country, providing a solution focussed approach to the barrage of online issues that we face daily.

Over forty schools are now in the process of Trademarking their school names and logos, again, a further protection in the online space. We have re-branded the Very Useful Guide (VUG) to Cuidiú as part of the new website, massive thank you to Shay Bannon and The Welfare Committee for their fastidious updating of same over the years.

2. MEETING AND CONNECTING WITH MEMBERS

Building strong relationships with our members is essential for understanding your concerns and priorities. Over the past year, I've made it a priority to meet with members both in your schools and at regional meetings. I have felt so warmly welcomed and hope that you felt heard! These interactions have been invaluable in gaining insights into the challenges our members face and identifying ways in which we can better support you. A debt of gratitude to the tireless work of our Regional Chairs, Secretaries, Treasurers and Committees for providing priceless CPD, information and networking opportunities for our members. The introduction of NAPD Clinics has also been very rewarding, a safe space to meet with members, one to one.

Representing School Leaders at Department of Education Stakeholder Meetings

Advocating for the interests of our members at the highest levels of

decision making with the Department of Education is a crucial aspect of our role. I have had the privilege of representing school leaders at Department of Education stakeholder meetings, where I have worked to ensure that your voices are heard and your concerns are addressed in policy discussions and decision-making processes.

Some areas that I represent you include, Senior Cycle Partners Forum, Education for Sustainable Development, SNA Workforce Working Group 3, OIDE Leadership Steering Committee, DEIS Advisory Group.

3. DEVELOPING RELEVANT, ACCESSIBLE CPD FOR SCHOOL LEADERS

Continuous Professional Development is essential for school leaders to stay abreast of the latest trends, best practices, and of course regulatory changes in education. I am delighted with the successful introduction of Micro-Credentials in association with UL, providing our members with accessible and relevant CPD opportunities that align with your professional development needs.

I am excited about the future development of same across several providers based on your needs and feedback.

4. CONTINUING OUR CAMPAIGN FOR EXPERT ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT:

School Leaders play a pivotal role in the education system, and you deserve the necessary support to carry out their responsibilities effectively. That's why we have been steadfast in our campaign to secure expert administrative support for school leaders. While progress may be slow, we remain committed to advocating for this vital resource.

As I reflect on the past year, I can't help but acknowledge the challenges and sacrifices that come with transitioning into a new role. I have missed the 'buzz' of the school corridor and the daily interactions of the school community. However, hoping that I am making a difference in the work lives of my colleagues, supporting you in your very onerous roles, makes it worth the effort!

Looking ahead, I am excited about the opportunities and challenges that the coming year will bring. NAPD will continue to strive to support our members and amplify your voices, ensuring that you have the resources, advocacy, and representation you need to succeed. The National Executive guides us in the work that we do on your behalf and I'd like to thank them for their service to NAPD.

Together, our hope is that we will navigate the ever-changing landscape of education and emerge stronger and more resilient than ever before.

My hope is that you take time off over the summer period to rest, reflect and recharge. Spend time with loved ones, enjoy your hobbies and forget that 100s of passwords that float around in our heads all day!

Ar Aghaidh le Chéile

Rachel O' Connor, Deputy Director

NAPD-R

Ciarán McCormack

The Dublin Spring Lunch will take place on **Thursday 18 April** in the restaurant of Dáil Éireann, Kildare St, Dublin. There will also be an opportunity to visit the Dáil chamber.

The number of places is limited. Invitations have been sent to NAPDR members.

The annual overnight will take place this year in Donegal. Members will arrive on **Tuesday 14 May** with a day of organised activities, followed by dinner next day, **Wednesday 15 May**.

Details will be sent to members.



Ciarán McCormack is Chairperson NAPD-R. He retired as Principal of St Paul's College, Raheny, Dublin in 2014.



THE LEADER PROFILE

Pasi Sahlberg

by John Walshe



Finnish educationalist Pasi Sahlberg has visited schools in nearly 80 countries over the past few decades. Until he came to Ireland, he had rarely seen situations where a Principal can feel uncomfortable by just walking into a classroom unannounced, sitting there to observe a teacher at work and later offering feedback or advice.

Classroom visits by Irish school leaders do, of course, occur but usually after consultation and discussion or because of serious concerns about a particular teacher or class. The teacher could argue that it's not the Principal's role to check up on their teaching – that's the Inspectors' job. It will also be argued that the inspection regime has changed in recent years, with possible follow-up inspections of individual teachers if deemed necessary. In addition, parents can complain directly to the Teaching Council if they have serious worries about individual teachers.

These changes, however, don't take away from the caution that Irish Principals exercise to avoid confrontations, while their counterparts in many other countries feel they have a right and a duty to check on individual classes.

This is an issue Sahlberg thinks that is worth discussing in Ireland.

Nor has he seen many examples where teacher unions are so powerful that they can stop reforms simply by saying "no, thank you", as happened when the initial Junior Cycle proposals were rejected. He compares the virtual veto the unions have on curricular changes with the relative lack of influence afforded to the very people for whom the reforms are proposed in the first place – the students.

He believes that the traditional top-down approaches to curricular change in Ireland may not work anymore. He advocates involving students as well as teachers in the design process to ensure successful reforms – "If the schools, and especially the young people, realise that there's going to be a new plan coming to their school and nobody has asked them anything about it, then it may be difficult to move forward".

Sahlberg is a recognised authority on the education system in Finland, which emerged as a world leader in the first of the OECD's PISA assessment reports of Reading, Maths and Science two decades ago. The country has dropped since then for various reasons, but one of its strengths is still in changing curriculum culture, helped by providing a significant role for schools and students.

The author of the highly influential *Finnish Lessons*, he has moved on to pastures new and is currently Professor of Educational Leadership at the University of Melbourne in Australia. He is continuing to review global trends in education and is engaged in research on how digital devices and technology are eclipsing schools as the new source of information for students.

The impact of growing up digitally is a particular source of interest.

He sees the gap between the life and culture of a school and what the students experience outside and online widening all the time. Their way of communicating, of being connected, of being heard and of using their voices have radically changed. Their sense of belonging is weakening in Irish schools, as it is in most other OECD countries.

The diversity of identities, including sexual identities, that they have can be easier expressed on social media than in school. He cites the student who says "I'm not accepted as I am, but outside of the school I can express myself".

Sahlberg startled some participants at the NAPD/IPPN Symposium on school leadership held in the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Sanctuary in January, when he gave details of research on the effects of spending too much time on digital devices in Australia. Children were found to spend on average eight hours a day each week on smartphones and other devices – more hours at the weekend or holidays and fewer on school days.

Often, they are juggling two or even three devices at the same time. The average of eight hours is likely to be an underestimate for Australia and for Ireland, he reckons. However, not all of that time is 'wasted' he stresses, especially if it is used for learning and developing skills - "but it is hard to read Shakespeare online" he quips.

A late convert to the idea of banning smartphones in schools, he says it was a necessary band-aid because of the increasing amount of time and distraction spent on them. Three years ago, he would have said no to a ban but now because of the changing situation it's the easiest and fastest solution. Things have got so much worse in the last three to four years in terms of students' mental health and behaviour that he has come around to the UNESCO view that all things considered, smartphones should be banned in school.

It's not only the amount of time spent on them, the disrupted sleep and poor study patterns that are of concern but also the activities that may be neglected, such as reading and physical play. Little children are now spending less time on traditional forms of play because they are consuming so much time on digital devices and, of course, television. But he understands the pressures on busy parents.

Half of the schools surveyed in Australia have observed a decline in students' overall readiness to learn, while 60% of children who struggle at school go to bed with their devices. The figures for Ireland are almost certainly in the same league, he told *The Leader* in an interview.

Banning smartphones in school still leaves the question of who will ensure that the children have the opportunity to learn and to understand how to live with these devices. The

answer is to educate young people to understand and behave with the technology in a way that is safe and responsible. Half of the schools and teachers surveyed in Australia say they would love to see parents engaged and half of the parents say that they would like to see schools play a greater role in helping students come to grips with the technology.

Sahlberg wants a nuanced understanding, recognising that each student engages with technology differently. Every young person is different and we need to avoid stereotyping people and looking for a single solution.

He concluded "we have to work on digital well-being or digital wellness. This is where the role of young people is absolutely critical. We need to create a sustainable digital wellness in our communities and in our schools".

Pasi Sahlberg is Finnish educator, teacher, and author. He has worked as a schoolteacher, teacher-educator, academic, and policymaker in Finland, and he has advised schools and education system leaders around the world. He served as a senior education specialist at the World Bank (Washington, DC), lead education specialist at the European Training Foundation (Torino, Italy), director general at the Finland's Ministry of Education and Culture (CIMO), and visiting professor of Practice at Harvard University. He is a recipient of several awards for his lifelong service in education, including the 2012 Education Award (Finland), the 2014 Robert Owen Award (Scotland), the 2016 Lego Prize (Denmark), Rockefeller Foundation's Bellagio Resident Fellowship in 2017, and Dr Paul Brock Memorial Medal in 2021. In 2013 his book "Finnish Lessons: What Can the World Learn from Educational Change in Finland" won the Grawemeyer Award (U.S.) for an idea that has potential to change the world. His most recent books include "Let the Children Play: How more play will save our schools and help children thrive" (2019, with William Doyle), "Finnish Lessons 3.0: What Can the World Learn from Educational Change in Finland" (2021), and "In Teachers We Trust: The Finnish way to world-class schools" (2021, with Tim Walker). He is currently Professor of Educational Leadership at the University of Melbourne, Australia. Pasi lives in South Melbourne with his wife and two sons.



John Walshe was appointed special adviser to Ruairi Quinn who was Minister for Education and Skills from March 2011 to July 2014. Prior to that, John was an educational editor, mostly with the *Irish Independent* but also with the *Irish Times* in the early 1990s. He was a consultant to the OECD in Paris, where he was involved in four major studies on education.



THE CARNEY ANGLE





ANALYSING EDUCATION

By Sean McDonagh



Educational Formats

INTRODUCTION

Educational Formats include a set of objectives, a range of validated subjects with defined delivery methods. They vary in duration. Some include related work experience. Formats should promote intellectual development and confer competences. When assessed, validated formats confer credit or full qualifications in the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). In familiar language, formats are referred to as "Full-Time", "Part-Time" and "Work-and Study" formats.

Ireland is facing major challenges and change. There is a demographic change with a growing and aging population. There is the greening and digitalisation of society and the economy, with change and upgrading of the skills required. A major challenge is that the Educational Formats provided adapt to change and confer excellence, inclusiveness, relevance and progression with opportunities throughout life to reskill and upskill.

This note, for discussion, draws attention to some aspects of Educational Formats.

NATIONAL FRAMEWORK OF QUALIFICATIONS (NFQ)

The Irish NFQ classifies validated qualifications at 10 levels. The NFQ promotes credit accumulation and qualification acquisition through a variety of formats, modes and delivery methods. It promotes upward pathways from one NFQ level to higher levels.

Table 1: Some NFQ Levels and Qualifications

Level	Qualification	Level	Qualification
3	Junior Cycle	4/5	Established Leaving Certificate Leaving Cert Vocational Programme
4/5/6	Further Education and Training	7	Ordinary Degree
8	Honours Degree	5/6/7/8/9	Apprenticeships
9	Masters Degrees	10	Doctorates

“Full-Time” education in schools and colleges usually involves educational activity during an “Academic Year” of about 36 weeks in schools and 33 weeks in Colleges and Universities.

The organisation of Colleges into a two-and-a-half semester year of two 16-week semesters and an eight-week summer half-semester, offers additional opportunities for formats enabling adult learners, returnees and more work-and-study formats. Remote delivery can add to format diversity.

SENIOR CYCLE

Senior Cycle formats are undergoing redevelopment. The NCCA informs us that “Senior Cycle is changing and will soon focus on our young people’s key competences”.

The Five Key Skills they advocate are:

- Information Processing
- Communicating
- Critical Creative Thinking
- Working with Others
- Being Personally Effective

The OECD Report “Education at a Glance, 2023”, in considering education for 15–19-year-olds, distinguished two format types of Upper Secondary Education: “General” and “Vocational”. On average, it tells us, across 42 countries, 37% of this age-group in Upper-Secondary are pursuing Vocational Education. Amongst the 42 countries, the OECD ranks Ireland as having the second lowest proportion of such Vocational students (after Canada and before New Zealand).

The OECD also reports that the enrolment rate of 15–19-year-olds in Ireland – it gives 93.7% in 2021 – is one of the highest among OECD and partner countries – ranked 3 out of 42.

In 2022 the breakdown of Leaving Certificate enrolments was ELC (66.6%), LCVP (27.0%) and LCA (6.4%). Should there be a one-year Senior Cycle format leading to a Level 4 qualification and enabling access to another one-year format yielding a Level 5 qualification?

SENIOR CYCLE FORMATS

The 2/3-year Senior Cycle offers full-time students four formats:

- **Transition Year (TY)** is a one-year post Junior Cycle format undergoing revision. TY does not lead to a NFO qualification or credit.
- **Established Leaving Certificate (ELC):** In this two-year format students typically take Mathematics and Irish (at three levels) and English and four other subjects at two levels – Higher and Ordinary. The proportions taking these two levels vary by subject. In 2023 for Mathematics, Irish and English the Higher Proportions were 38.2%, 51.1% and 75.5% respectively. Biology and Geography had 83.0% and 82.7% at Higher while History and French had 76.0% and 74.1%. Typically, students sit ten written examinations in a three-week period at the end of the two years.

In its reform, new and revised subjects in the ELC will be available. There will be a reduced emphasis on final examinations through greater emphasis on assessment. The new subjects of Drama, Film & Theatre Studies and Climate Action & Sustainable Development will be introduced.

- **Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP):** In this 2-Year format students take five ELC subjects and two activity-based Link Modules in Enterprise Education and Preparation for Work.
- **Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA):** In the reformed LCA, students will have improved access to Mathematics and Modern Foreign Languages, broadening their future options.

In 2022 the breakdown of Leaving Certificate enrolments was ELC (66.6%), LCVP (27.0%) and LCA (6.4%).



Should there be a one-year Senior Cycle format leading to a Level 4 qualification and enabling access to another one-year format yielding a Level 5 qualification?

SENIOR CYCLE AND GENDER

Studies of the Senior Cycle formats examine performance by socio-economic background, school type and gender. Table 2 illustrates some gender aspects of choice by listing the 2023 Leaving Certificate Higher Level subjects by their majority gender and that gender's percentage. Female majorities are in column 1 and male majority Higher subjects in column 3.

Subjects, such as History and Geography, which have male and female Higher uptake between 45% and 55% may be regarded as "balanced".



Should subject choices by gender be more balanced?

Table 2: Higher Level Subjects by Majority Gender, 2023, %

Female Majority	%			Male Majority	%
Home Economics	88.3%	80%+		Engineering	90.7%
				Construction	85.1%
		65%+		Technology	83.3%
Art	74.8%			Graphic Design	79.4%
Music	69.0%			Computer Science	79.1%
				Applied Maths	71.3%
				Physics	70.8%
		55%+		PE	66.9%
Biology	63.1%			Economics	64.7%
French	62.8%			Agricultural Science	56.3%
Irish	61.3%	50%+			
Politics & Society	60.4%			Geography	53.4%
Spanish	59.9%			Accounting	53.4%
Chemistry	59.8%			History	51.7%
German	54.4%			Maths	50.7%
English	54.2%				
Business Studies	50.8%				

In 2023 the major subjects English and Mathematics were balanced in gender Higher uptake but not in performance. In English, the Grades H1/H2 were achieved by 28.5% of females but only 21.4% of males.

In Higher Mathematics, H1/H2 was achieved by 30.8% of males but only 24.0% of females.

- Males dominate Higher Engineering and Technology related subjects
- Females dominate Higher Home Economics
- Females dominate the arts – Higher Art and Music
- In the Sciences, females are a strong majority in the uptake of Higher Biology and Chemistry while males dominate Higher Physics and Agricultural Science
- Higher Business and Accounting are balanced but Economics has a male majority
- The Languages Higher Irish, French and Spanish have female majorities but Higher English and German were more balanced in 2023

LCVP statistics for 2023 show a gender balance in its uptake. However where 47.8% of females earned a Distinction in the Link Modules only 29.4% of males did so – a major difference.

POINTS SYSTEM

Great emphasis is placed in Ireland on the Points System of calculating Leaving Certificate achievement and selecting for Higher Education.

Points are awarded for passing grades at both levels, Higher and Ordinary and for LCVP Link Modules. Points are awarded for six subjects, with the same points pattern awarded for all subjects (except for the Higher Mathematics, which has a 25-point bonus), regardless of whether they are prerequisite subjects or of the gender proportion taking the Higher Level. In this system H1 earns 100, O1 earns 56 and Distinction in LCVP Link Modules earns 68.

In 2023, points were announced for 58,006 candidates. About a quarter of these (14,178, 24.4%) earned 500 or more points.

Studies of student progression and completion show that such candidates typically succeed in Higher Education.

In 2023, about a quarter of the candidates (14,074, 24.2%) also achieved less than 300 points.



Would many of these be better served by formats with fewer subjects, the encouragement of credit gain each year and progression paths to qualifications at Levels 5, 6 and Higher?

NORTHERN IRELAND

In 2023, the ESRI published research on undergraduate mobility between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

Students from the North who apply to the CAO need four A-Levels to achieve maximum points. Only a handful do so – the most common format is three A-Levels. Furthermore, the language requirement for many courses limits Northern Ireland access as fewer take languages there.

The Educational Formats in the North therefore generally do not facilitate enrolment in the South. In 2020/2021, 1,255 students from Northern Ireland attended HE in the Republic, while 13,685 attended in Britain.

ENGLAND

In England about half the 18-year-olds take A-Level, first introduced in 1951. They typically take 3-4 subjects in a two-year format. In 2020 T-Levels were introduced – vocational qualifications aimed at 16-19-year-olds, with an emphasis on practical subjects.

The T-Level format includes a mixture of classroom learning and on-the-job experience. In 2023 about 3,500 took the T-level qualification (from the 5,210 that started T-Level two years earlier).

Reports, such as the EDSK Reports, have recommended change of formats. In November 2023, in the King's speech, the English Government announced the intention to introduce a new format – The Advanced British Standard (ABS) – which will bring academic and technical, A-Level and T-Level, into the same qualification. A-Level and T-Level will eventually be replaced.

Apprentice formats are designed and delivered by collaboration between Education and Training providers and employers. They consist of periods of learning at an educational or training centre, enriched by periods of mentored related work experience.

- While many A-Level students now take 3-4 subjects, students taking ABS will take 5.
- Every student will study some form of Mathematics and English to age 18.
- Some subjects will be “major” and others “minor”.
- Students will be free to mix technical and academic subjects.

The King’s speech also promised “to reduce the number of young people studying poor quality University degrees” and “to increase the number undertaking high quality apprenticeships”.

One of Britain’s largest examination bodies, AQA, in a significant announcement, has revealed that it is starting to move towards Digital Examinations at GCSE and A-Level in 2026 – saying “using technology to take examinations is the future”.

SCOTLAND

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework has 12 levels.

- In 2023, at National 5 there were 321,360 subject entries with gender parity in entries.
- At Level 6 – Highers – where students typically take 5 subjects in a one-year format there were 191,810 subject entries in 2023 (Female 53.7%, Male 46.3%). Highers can earn University entry.
- At Level 7 (same level as HNC) some students remain to take Advanced Highers taking, typically, three subjects in a one-year format. In 2023 Advanced Highers attracted 27,730 subject entries (Female 55.3%, Male 44.7%). Advanced Highers can earn direct entry to second-year University.

APPRENTICE FORMATS

Apprentice formats are designed and delivered by collaboration between Education and Training providers and employers. They consist of periods of learning at an educational or training centre, enriched by periods of mentored related work experience.

In the past, apprenticeship was strongly focussed on Engineering Trades (with an all-male intake). The Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021-2025 advocated Apprentice Formats for a wide variety of careers and skills development. Engineering trades are still of major importance and their apprenticeships lead to qualifications at NQF Level 6, after a four-year apprenticeship.

Modern apprenticeships, across a wide variety of occupations, can lead to qualifications at Levels 6 to 9 in the NQF and be of 2-, 3- or 4-years duration. They can, in many cases, enable access to higher level courses and qualifications.

The National Apprenticeship Office has set a target of 10,000 new annual apprentice registrations by 2025. At the end of 2023, some 27,470 were registered in apprenticeships in 80+ occupations with over 9,000 employers.

Females constituted 2,272 (or 8.3%) of these. In 2023, 8,712 new apprentices had registered, with 6,588 (75.6%) of these in the craft area.

Apprentice Formats offer many advantages. The mentored work experience, in an adult environment, establishes the relevance of the learning and motivates the apprentice. Learning and experience are calendar-year long during the apprenticeship.

Student debt is avoided – apprentices earn as they learn.

JUNIOR CYCLE

In October 2023, 70,727 students received their Level 3 Junior Cycle Record of Achievement, which in 2022 fully replaced the Junior Certificate format. Sixteen years earlier, in 2007, 71,389 babies were born in the Republic of Ireland. This generation, with longer working lives, will play an important role in a changing Irish society and economy until 2075 and beyond.

It is vital that the Junior Cycle format confer excellence and inclusiveness in preparation for higher qualification acquisition and for lifelong reskilling and upskilling.

Of the 70,727, one quarter, 17,584 (24.8%), came from Dublin and a half, 36,308 (51.3%), from Dublin and four other counties – Cork, Galway, Kildare and Meath.

The Dublin entry exceeded the entry from the lowest 14 counties, highlighting the need for new forms of knowledge-based regional development.

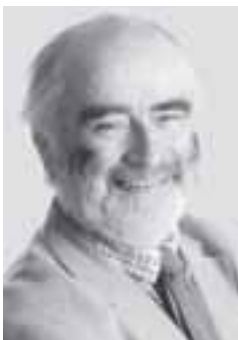
Building on standards of Literacy and Numeracy and with Digital Skills, the Framework for the Junior Cycle seeks to be guided by eight Principles:

- Quality
- Engagement and Participation
- Learning to Learn
- Continuity and Development
- Choice and Flexibility
- Inclusive Education
- Creativity and Innovation
- Wellbeing

Of the 20 subjects for which results were announced, only three – Irish, Mathematics and English – had results at two levels, Higher and Ordinary.

Interestingly, there were two Irish Language programmes – one for Gaelscoileanna which attracted 2,776 (4.7%) of entries and one for the remaining majority 59,382 (95.3%) of Irish language students.

The grading of Junior Cycle subjects distinguished Distinction (90+%), Higher Merit (75-89%), Merit (55-74%), Achieved (40-54%) and Partially Achieved (20-39%). The low percentage of those achieving Distinction in 2023 – less than 4% in thirteen subjects including English, Irish and Mathematics – attracted comment.



Seán McDonagh is a former Director of an Institute of Technology and a former University Lecturer in Mathematics. He was Director of the Skills Initiative Unit promoting actions to increase the supply of technicians to the Irish economy. He was a member of the national Expert Group for Future Skill Needs. Recent activities have included membership of an international group advising on Educational Strategy in the Sultanate of Oman. He was keynote speaker at a European Conference of the Universities of Applied Science in the Hague and at a meeting of the Danish University Colleges at Kolding. He has spoken on education in Columbia and at the national conference of the British Educational Studies Association.

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Insurance Matters

Emma Coughlan, Allianz

CASE 1

Employee injured during course of employment

The Board of Management hired a cleaning contractor to carry out cleaning duties in the school. The cleaners came into school every day at 3pm to carry out their duties. The cleaning company were working in the school for over 15 years. One afternoon an employee (teacher) fell in the corridor sustaining injuries. The employee sued the cleaning company and the Board of Management for injuries sustained. We investigated the claim and identified that the fall did happen and it was evident on the CCTV footage that water was spilled on the floor by the cleaner and not cleaned up properly by the cleaner.

The employee did sustain serious injuries as per medical reports. During our investigations we identified that the Board of Management had no contract in place with the cleaning company for 15 years and the cleaning company had no insurance policy in place. The insured failed to input an adequate contract with the cleaning company and failed to request the certificate of insurance from the cleaning company. The cleaning company were clearly liable for this incident.

When the claim entered litigation the cleaning company were in liquidation. This left the Board of Management completely exposed in relation to the claim. This claim ran in the High Court, the cleaning company were unrepresented on the day which left the Board of Management to foot the claim under the Occupiers Liability Act.

Lesson Learned: Board of Managements must ensure adequate contracts are in place with contracting companies whether it be cleaners, catering companies, transport companies etc. The Board of Management must also request Certificate of Insurance from the contracting company every year not just the first year – to ensure contractors are renewing their insurance policy annually.

CASE 2

Slip and fall injury sustained by a parent collecting her son from school

This last case involves a slip and fall wherein a parent was collecting her son from school and was traversing the corridor from her son's classroom to the front door when she alleges she was caused to slip and fall when her left leg skidded to the right and she fell forward. The injured parent alleged that her slip and fall was due to the condition of the floor and that the school had allowed a liquid to be present on the floor on the occasion in question.

There were two witnesses to the parent's accident and it was captured on a CCTV camera. One of the teachers was also walking up the corridor from her classroom and witnessed the fall. The teacher confirmed that she checked the floor to see if it was wet or if there was anything else that could have caused someone to fall and was in a position to confirm that the floor was dry and free from any debris. The second witness was sitting at the entrance hall waiting for her daughter to come out of the classroom and she witnessed the fall. She confirmed that the parent who sustained the injury was walking briskly towards the main door accompanied by a child and appeared to be wearing quite high heeled shoes. She also confirmed that the floor was not wet as she would have informed the Caretaker or the Principal if it had been.

Reference was made to a curving black stain on the floor surface at the location where she fell and this was put forward as the reason for her slip. Engineering reports confirmed that the floor presented a low risk of slip when clean and dry.

The case was allowed to proceed to trial in the knowledge that liability would be decided on the basis of what evidence would be accepted by the Court in relation to the state of the floor. The school were entitled to rely on their two witnesses. The case was taken in the High Court and significant claims were made for loss of earnings together with general damages and costs. On the morning of the trial an application was made by the injured parent's legal team for an adjournment as their client was unwell. This was considered to be a very late notification of this and in the absence of a medical certificate was not satisfactory.

The Judge confirmed that she wanted to see the injured parent in Court the following morning. The injured parent did present the following morning and was cross examined by the school's Senior Counsel in relation to all aspects of her case and also relating to injuries sustained in a previous accident and her claim for loss of earnings, etc.

The Court broke for lunch and the school's legal team were approached and informed that the injured parent would withdraw her claim on the basis that she was not pursued for costs. This was a very good outcome from the point of view of the school and it was agreed to allow the injured parent walk away in the matter.

Topical legal issues for schools and why common sense is required



David Ruddy
B.L.

BEHAVIOURS OF CONCERN - RESPONDING TO A CRISIS

The complexities of managing behaviours of concern are increasingly a challenge for schools. This somewhat coincides with the opening of multi-special classes. Generally, such classes and their students provide very positive experiences for schools. Equally, some students who don't have complex needs can also exhibit very challenging behaviours.

Effective crisis response strategies to mitigate potential risks and ensure the safety and well-being of students is a must for schools. The importance of having a policy and plan in the event of a crisis is a good starting point. Schools regularly rehearse fire drills, but do they rehearse for a crisis in which the health and safety of students and staff are at risk due to behaviours of concern?

Plan on the basis that a crisis will happen, rather than it might happen. Staff should know what to do and more importantly what not to do. Who are the staff members best placed to de-escalate a possible crisis?

Plan on the basis that a crisis will happen, rather than it might happen. Staff should know what to do and more importantly what not to do. Who are the staff members best placed to de-escalate a possible crisis? Has the school a reporting/recording template fit for purpose? The use of physical intervention in crisis situations and its implications for staff and students should also be considered.

What is the relationship between the code of behaviour, the health & safety statement and the crisis? What type of allowances do we make for students with complex needs in administering sanctions as permitted by the code of behaviour?

Have we considered a Behaviour of Concern Policy as an appendix to the code of behaviour?

"By failing to prepare, you're preparing to fail" - Benjamin Franklin.

BECAUSE OF GDPR?

The introduction of GDPR has triggered a significant shift in our perception of data protection. Schools are contending with different challenges in terms of ensuring they are balancing the sharing of student personal information with staff and the data subjects' rights.

The Data Protection Commission has engaged in a

A recent experience involved an estranged father seeking the Junior Certificate results of his daughter. The student was consulted and refused to allow her results to be shared with her father.

consultative process with schools in relation to the rights of students. After all, the data is personal information about the student. The sharing of such data may require student consent and may not be the prerogative of the parent/guardian alone.

A recent experience involved an estranged father seeking the Junior Certificate results of his daughter. The student was consulted and refused to allow her results to be shared with her father.

Another issue that sometimes confronts school leaders is when a staff member seeks access to state exam results or particularly sensitive reports concerning a student. Sometimes a school leader's default position maybe to refuse - based on GDPR.

A school leader needs to make decisions on the basis of the school's Data Protection Policy. Is the request from the staff member based on information they seek in order to assist them in supporting a student? Any such sharing of information should be on a need-to-know basis that the school can stand over.

If a school leader has identified that consent is the

appropriate legal basis for the sharing of certain information, then they will generally need to obtain the consent of the student's parent or guardian to do so, or indeed the students themselves depending on age.

Consent is not the only legal basis for processing personal data – and there may be instances when a school may be in a position to rely on legitimate interest as their legal basis i.e. child safeguarding. It's important to note that where a data controller is relying on the legitimate interest's legal basis, this requires a balancing exercise to make sure that the rights and interests of an individual, especially where the individual is a child, are taken into account and aren't unfairly disregarded.

GDPR does not provide an exact roadmap on when it's permissible to share certain sensitive information with staff. However, a balanced, common-sense approach will go a long way towards ensuring that a student' rights are respected, while also ensuring that data protection doesn't become an obstacle to support a student's education and welfare.



David Ruddy works with Mason, Hayes & Curran LLP as an adviser and trainer. For further information on this article, contact David at druddy@mhc.ie.

Norman Ashe was an Irish photographer based in Dublin, whose aerial photography covered the years 1948-1953.

Much of his work has also been lost but about 1,000 surviving plates survived. These are being curated by Pat Kiersey, an art and photography teacher with Dún Laoghaire VEC from 1978 to 2018. Pat can be contacted at normanashe.collection@gmail.com.

For more information on this collection search for "The Old Drone – Norman Ashe Aerial Collection" or scan here.



SCAN ME

Clonkeen Road, Blackrock

Bottom left (from Blackrock) to top right (toward Dunnes Stores Cornelscourt and N11, south to Wicklow/Wexford.

In 1967 Clonkeen College opened on fields to the left of Clonkeen Road. ERST, Edmund Rice Schools Trust, launched in 2008, later opened their headquarters on the same site.



Norman Ashe Collection – 1948-53

Skills Needs in a Changing Economy

John FitzGerald



The success of the Irish economy over the last 50 years owes a huge amount to the successful investment in education. It has been crucial in moving Ireland from being one of the poorer economies in the EU to being one of the best off.

For those born in the early 1950s, before free second level education became the norm, half of them left at or before the Inter Cert and only 20% progressed to Third Level. By contrast, for those born in the early 1980s, under 15% left school without a Leaving Cert and 45% went on to Third Level.

For those born in the early 2000s, the figures are even better, especially because of a further reduction in the number of early school leavers.

In turn, the investment in education has helped transform the economy, as the difference between the earning power and productivity of those who have Third Level qualifications and those who leave school early is huge. In particular, for much of the last 50 years many of those who left school with very limited qualifications were likely to spend a significant part of their lives unemployed, with all the social as well as the economic disadvantages that entailed.

Keeping the vast majority of children in school, so that they acquire the skills to lead a normal life, has had very valuable social consequences, contributing to the near elimination of involuntary unemployment.

Since 1970, a further vital change in Irish society has been the ending of major permanent emigration and, more recently, its replacement by large scale immigration.

For those who still emigrate, they tend to be homing pigeons, returning to Ireland after a period abroad with new

experience and skills and possibly even another language. Today 20% of those who were born in Ireland who have Third Level qualifications are returned emigrants. ESRI research shows that, because of their additional experience and skills, these returned emigrants earn up to 10% more than those with similar qualifications who never left.

This reflects their higher productivity wherever they work as a result of what they learned living and working in a different society.

Those born elsewhere who come to work in Ireland are at least as well educated as the native-born population. Just over half of the Irish people who have spent a period abroad have had a Third Level education. For those who have come to Ireland from France, Germany, Spain, Italy, India, Australia and North America an even higher share of those aged over 15 have Third Level education.

This influx of talent has been very important in expanding the output of the economy and, hence, the living standards of all those living here.

However, it is not just about "quantity of education"; the quality of the education provided at both Primary and Second Level in Ireland has also been really important. In the past, class sizes tended to be larger than in many other countries, but this did not affect the quality of the education.

International comparisons suggest that the Irish first and second Level education systems perform very well providing a very good education for the children of Ireland. A key factor in this has been the quality of the teaching force.

The success of this investment in what economists call human capital can be seen in the expansion of the wider economy. Even allowing for oddities in how output is



An increasing share of the highly trained workforce have found employment in high paid jobs, often in the manufacturing and IT sectors. Because of the demand from these sectors for relevant skills, the Third Level sector has tended to specialise into providing the necessary expertise.

measured, Ireland has one of the highest incomes per head in the world, significantly higher than most other EU members.

Since the financial crash we have seen the economy bounce back vigorously, with the pandemic only temporarily denting economic progress. An increasing share of the highly trained workforce have found employment in high paid jobs, often in the manufacturing and IT sectors. Because of the demand from these sectors for relevant skills, the Third Level sector has tended to specialise into providing the necessary expertise.

However, the output of graduates in Ireland has not been sufficient to meet the need of these sectors for talent, and many of those who have come from abroad to work in Ireland in recent years have filled the vacancies in these sectors.

The attraction of these sectors for young labour market entrants is due, in no small part, to the high rates of pay in most of the sectors dominated by Multinational Enterprises (MNEs). While average pay in the economy today is around €47,000, in the IT sector it is closer to €80,000. The success of these high paying MNE-dominated sectors has attracted an increasing share of the workforce.

While in 2013, 27% of the wage bill in Ireland went to those working in MNE companies, by 2022 it was 36%. In turn, those working in these sectors pay a disproportionate share of taxes on income, benefitting the rest of the economy.

However, the very success of these sectors may be skewing the training and education of our labour force in ways that may be disadvantageous for Ireland in the longer term.

Today, while Ireland is saving at a high rate, it simultaneously has many unmet needs, particularly in the housing sector, healthcare and domestic infrastructure. While we have the resources to pay for lots more houses, its is not like cars or foreign holidays. While cars are all imported and foreign holidays obviously are produced abroad, houses cannot be imported in kit form and sold through IKEA. Instead, they have to be built from scratch in Ireland using labour living in Ireland.

A similar challenge arises in building necessary infrastructure, such as a metro or improved water supply. While model train sets, manufactured abroad, can be bought in a shop, in real life the tunnels and tracks for a metro have to be constructed on site. A recent study by the ESRI shows

that delivering clean electric energy will also require lots more people to build the renewable energy generation, even if the windmills are made elsewhere in Europe and the solar panels in China.

To meet these vital domestic needs, we will need to redirect some of the fully-employed work force to where they are most needed. This will require a slight reorientation of the skills and training provided by the educational system. For example, it probably means that we should prioritise more civil and electrical engineers rather than software engineers.

In the case of the building and construction sector, we need to rapidly expand the production of relevant skills, such as plumbers, electricians and carpenters. While new production methods may result in higher productivity in the sector, there is no escaping the need for many more people with relevant skills if we are to produce many more houses and the necessary infrastructure to support them.

While new courses can be designed and rolled out by the educational system to meet these needs, that does not mean that young people will choose these relevant fields of study. In Ireland today, the mere fact that courses exist does not mean that young people will choose to avail of the opportunities that they provide.

Finding a way to attract young people to these alternative fields of study and training will be challenging.

For example, in the years of the Celtic Tiger many young people chose civil engineering, to join in the building boom, rather than electrical or chemical engineering. As soon as the bust happened in 2008-2009, the numbers studying civil engineering plummeted, while demand for electrical engineering rose. This is an example of how the choices young people make can be driven by short-term expectations.

In the past, many of the skills needed in the building and construction sector were provided within the Second Level system, often combined with apprenticeships. Today, with the majority of young people continuing on to Third Level, much of this education and training needs to take place in the Third Level sector.

I don't know how we are going to reorient the choices of a limited number of young people towards the training and education needed to provide the slightly different skill mix that Ireland will need in the future. It is not that we should give up on educating and training people for the burgeoning MNE sector, but rather that we need to achieve a moderate redirection of resources to ensure a more balanced supply of skilled labour for the future.

The problems of managing a fully employed economy are new to us and, in turn, we will have to find new answers.

John FitzGerald is an honorary fellow and adjunct professor of economics at Trinity College Dublin, a Research Affiliate at the Economic and Social Research Institute and a Member of the Royal Irish Academy.





Ireland Gets it Right

Mark Boobbyer

Sir Anthony Seldon, who has written biographies of the last seven British Prime Ministers and is currently working on that of Liz Truss (a slim volume?), wrote in the Spectator recently that “our young people deserve inspiration, joy and love in their schools - which should be places that discover and celebrate what they can do, not what they cannot. At present, our lacklustre education system at large is failing our young people, employers and the country”.

Of course, he is writing about the UK and not Ireland, but I love the sentiment about what schools should be all about.

The Leaving Certificate is about to be overhauled, and while most educators would be in favour of changes to the way in which it is examined, I actually think that Ireland gets more right than the UK does in many aspects - and I speak as someone who spent most of his career teaching in the UK.

In the UK, pupils spend the last four years of their secondary schooling on a relentless exam treadmill, culminating usually in three A Levels, the narrowest finishing exam system of any country. Children at 16 choose just three subjects in which to specialise, when most young people have yet to realise where their gifts and interests lie and would like to keep their options open.

About 25 years ago, AS Levels were introduced and pupils were able to opt for 4 or 5 subjects for a year, before going down to 3 or 4 A Levels for their final year. That was an improvement but it has been thrown out and almost all now just do the three subjects for their last two years. In the opinion of many, it was not the theory behind AS Levels that was at fault, but the way they were examined.

Does that sound familiar?

One of the results of this is that creative subjects such as Music and Art in the UK are taking a hammering. If I want to do Medicine, I need to do Biology, Chemistry and probably Maths or Physics and there is no room for the luxury of the creative subject, which would provide balance and inspiration. Candidates for Oxbridge and Russell Group Universities are told to avoid 'soft' subjects, which suggest a lack of academic seriousness. With four or five subjects there was some room for the extra creative option, but with only three ... forget it!

There are three things that I think Ireland gets right and from which the UK can learn.

Firstly, the exam treadmill only extends to the last two years of secondary school rather than four. Yes, the Junior Cycle exams are important but they do not carry the weight of expectation and pressure of GCSEs.

And, of course, they do not lead straight into the Leaving Certificate because of the Transition Year - the second thing that Ireland does differently. It is a great concept to give our children a year without the pressure of public exams, as they puzzle out who they are. I am a big fan of the TY, which,

“

Thirdly, as I hinted at above, the Leaving Certificate, while it may be rather limited in the way it is examined, allows for a far broader range of subjects for 16-year-olds to study, keeping options open for longer and not cutting off avenues for the future, at a stage when, for most pupils, interests are still developing.

“

I also want to add one further way in which I think Ireland gets it right. Our recent Child Safeguarding Inspection was a two-visit affair. The first visit turned up a few things that needed to be tightened and the second visit made sure that the requisite changes had been made.



at its best, allows young people, before choosing which direction they want to go academically, to experience a variety of new subjects; it allows teachers to go beyond the curriculum, or outside it altogether, and pursue areas of interest that do not need to fit into the narrow and unimaginative constraints of the dreaded syllabus. The year allows for work experience, service work, trips, speakers and (dare I say it) some fun!

Is that allowed?

Thirdly, as I hinted at above, the Leaving Certificate, while it may be rather limited in the way it is examined, allows for a far broader range of subjects for 16-year-olds to study, keeping options open for longer and not cutting off avenues for the future, at a stage when, for most pupils, interests are still developing. The German Abitur is much broader for far longer; the International Baccalaureate is much broader and still very rigorous and growing in popularity in the UK for schools that can afford to make the change.

Students in the USA keep going with a broad range of subjects right through high school and into their first year at College, only specialising in the second year. It also allows undergraduates to do modules and get credits for courses that are not connected to their main degree. I can study Astrophysics and still indulge my interest in Ancient Greek.

I think the UK system of three A Levels goes back to an age when most subjects were seen as inferior to the 'serious

ones' and all were inferior to Latin and Greek (I speak as a classicist!). But no one, inventing an education system now, would suddenly say "I have a great idea. Let's get our 15- and 16-year-olds to choose just three subjects, even though they have no idea what they want to do with their lives ... and let's make it really hard for them to do the creative subjects, as that won't improve their earning potential".

I also want to add one further way in which I think Ireland gets it right. Our recent Child Safeguarding Inspection was a two-visit affair. The first visit turned up a few things that needed to be tightened and the second visit made sure that the requisite changes had been made. It was rigorous and, let's face it, no one enjoys an inspection, but I did not get the feeling that the inspectors were there to find fault.

In fact, the lead inspector said at one point "we want to make sure that you are fully compliant in all areas by the time we leave". Ofsted in the UK has a terrible reputation and it has taken the suicide of an experienced and well-respected headteacher for there to be serious talk of reform.

The jeopardy of the one-word outcome to an inspection means that the pressure that is brought to bear can be unbearable. I certainly appreciated the sense that the inspectors and I were working together to get the best outcome for the school and the children, rather than desperately trying to avoid public embarrassment from sneaky inspectors looking for reasons to mark us down.

I need to own up. Anthony Seldon was my Headmaster for six years and he was staying with us while writing that article. I am in full agreement with him – our young people *do* deserve inspiration, joy and love in our schools; and our schools should be places that discover and celebrate what they can do, not what they cannot.

There is more chance of that happening when the curriculum is kept broader for longer and creativity is encouraged. Doing seven subjects for the Leaving Certificate allows the brightest pupils to study the subjects necessary for Medicine or Economics, while still allowing space for the humanities, and for Art or Music, which nourish the soul and make us fully human.

And doesn't that give us a greater chance of making our schools places of human flourishing, of inspiration, joy and love?

Mark Boobbyer has been the Warden of St. Columba's College in Dublin since 2016. Prior to that, he was Head of Tiger Kloof Educational Institution, a school serving a very disadvantaged community in the North West Province of South Africa.



Group Mentoring for Principals appointed in 2023/2024

For Principals in their second year of Principalship

Máire Ní Bhróithe & Mary Keane

Principal Mentoring is organised on a regional basis for all Principals appointed in the 2023/2024 academic year.

WHO ARE THE MENTORS?

NAPD has 15 trained mentors around the country, who are all very experienced Principals. They received their initial training from OIDE (formerly The Centre for School Leadership) and subsequently engaged in further training in group mentoring with NAPD. They meet twice a year to engage with each other and attend all OIDE professional learning events each year.

WHAT SIZE ARE THE GROUPS?

Groups vary in size, depending on the number of Principals appointed in a particular area. Groups can be as small as three and as large as 8. In some areas of the country there will be two mentors working with a group.

WHERE ARE MEETINGS HELD?

Meetings are usually held in Education Centres and hotels. Sometimes they are held in a school if a group requests.

Some meetings may make take place online. This might happen in poor weather or if the Principals are geographically very far apart.



WHAT HAPPENS AT MEETINGS?

Meetings begin with a lunch and then the actual meetings last up to 2 hours. Participants discuss issue such as staff shortages, responding to critical incidents, motivating staff, first encounters with challenging parents, having difficult conversations with colleagues, their own well-being, time management and conflict management.

Groups engage in deep discussion about some of the opportunities and difficulties they are experiencing in their new roles. Normally, the topics for the meeting are issues which are determined by the participants.





HOW OFTEN ARE THESE MEETINGS?

There will be 4 meetings throughout the year.

- Late August/Early September 2024
- November 2024
- February 2025
- April 2025

WHY SHOULD I JOIN A MENTORING GROUP?

Last year mentors reported that there was an excellent engagement among the mentees and that it was an incredibly positive experience for both mentors and mentees. There was a general feeling that everyone was grateful to leave the busy nature of their school buildings on the day, to take time for themselves in creating a space to talk, to be listened to, and to reflect. Mentees reported wonderful opportunities to network with each other. Contacts made in the early years often last throughout your career as a Principal.

I WAS APPOINTED IN 2022/2023 BUT NEVER GOT AN OPPORTUNITY TO JOIN A MENTORING GROUP LAST YEAR. CAN I JOIN A MENTORING GROUP NOW?

Yes – all are welcome. If you have not had an opportunity to be a part of group mentoring, please feel free to contact us



HOW CAN I JOIN A MENTORING GROUP?

If you would like to join one of the mentoring groups, Email: mentoring@napd.ie and one of the two Mentoring Co-ordinators will contact you and place you in a regional group.

The mentors will then contact you and invite you to the first meeting.

We wish all new Principals the best in their role and hope that the NAPD mentoring programme will benefit them throughout the 2024/2025 academic year and beyond.



Máire Ní Bhróithe and **Mary Keane** are NAPD's Mentoring co-ordinators. Máire is a former Principal of Ratoath College, Co Meath, a former Education & Leadership Director of LMETB and a former National Deputy Director of the CSL. Mary is former Principal of Christ King Secondary School, Cork.



The Irish Principal and Deputy Principal Health and Wellbeing Survey 2024

Shay Bannon
Lead Facilitator



The Irish Principal and Deputy Principal Health and Wellbeing Survey, open to members since 11 March, will close on Friday 19 April.

This is a confidential independent survey for Irish school Principals and Deputy Principals of both primary and second level schools. The survey was commissioned jointly by the Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN) and the National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD) and is being led by Professor Philip Riley (Deakin University, Melbourne) and his research team.

Research is being conducted in response to concerns that the increasing job complexity and workload demands of school leadership roles is impacting on the health and wellbeing of school leaders.

It is hoped that the results and findings from the research project will:

- support individual school leaders to prioritise their own health and wellbeing
- enable IPPN and NAPD to benchmark the demands on school leaders in Ireland against comparative international statistics

- help to improve the leadership reality of Irish school leaders, so that their leadership roles are more sustainable
- ensure the identification and delivery of supports for members in partnership with the Department of Education and other education stakeholders
- have a significant impact on future policy development in Ireland

The Australian Principal Health and Wellbeing survey started in 2010 and has since been undertaken in New Zealand, Ireland (2014, 2015) and more recently in Hong Kong and Finland. The survey resumed in Ireland in 2022 and is now in its third year.

Evidence from the Principal health and wellbeing surveys has been used to:

- develop policies and strategies to promote Principal and Deputy health and wellbeing
- inform discussion and campaigns to promote safe and healthy work environments and work roles for school leaders

- evaluate impact of policies and interventions – data is longitudinal and will run over a number of years in order to track the impact of policy decisions on educators

Participation involves completing a confidential online survey. The questions will cover areas such as working conditions, quality of life information, school of employment, work satisfaction, workplace discrimination, medication use, frequency of alcohol consumption and other personal information such as diet and exercise.

The collecting of this data is necessary to allow the research team to holistically understand the impact that work demands and workplaces have on Principals' and Deputy Principals' occupational health, safety and wellbeing.

The information provided will assist in better understanding of how to promote the health and wellbeing of those working in leadership roles in schools within Ireland.

Participant information is kept strictly confidential and no individual or school will be identifiable in any reporting of the results. Individual data is not accessible to anyone except the researchers and is de-identified before any analysis. All information gathered will be kept in the strictest confidence by the research team and will not be accessible to IPPN or NAPD.

Any information used for publication will be aggregated and de-identified to preserve participants' anonymity.

The survey takes about 45 minutes to complete and can be done over multiple sessions. You do not have to fill it out all at once – you can leave the partially completed survey at any time and resume by logging back on using your email address and password.

Participation is voluntary and you can withdraw from the survey at any time.

A helpdesk will be available every Monday morning (from 9am to 1pm) during each week of the survey. Contact: shaybannon@outlook.com

Shay Bannon is Chairperson of NAPD's Welfare Committee



Rock Road, Booterstown

Trimleston housing estate in the centre had just been built. The Tara Towers hotel was later built along this road to the right in 1970. The Punchbowl pub, licensed in 1779, occupied a site to the left of photo. The land in the top third at Belfield was purchased in stages by UCD from 1934 to 1958. In the early 1960s building commenced on the Belfield campus with the Science faculty.

Norman Ashe Collection – 1948-53



Getting your students set up for success with Studyclix

LUKE SAUNDERS
Science & Maths teacher and founder of Studyclix.ie

Every school in Ireland has teachers using Studyclix and now more than one in three buy Studyclix through the school to get their students access at a discounted price. Very often it is the principal or deputy principal at a school that takes a lead in getting their students set up.

ISN'T STUDYCLIX FREE?

Studyclix is free for teachers but students pay to upgrade their free Basic account to Plus or Premium.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS FOR MY STUDENTS?

Students can access all past exam papers categorised by topic, examiner-graded sample answers, solution videos, digital flashcards, quizzes and notes. Analysis of student grades indicates that students who use Studyclix do better in their Junior and Leaving cert exams.

HOW MUCH WILL IT COST FOR MY SCHOOL?

Upgrades start at €49.99 when bought individually by students. For schools buying Studyclix access for their students, prices start at **€10 per student**, with additional discounts for DEIS schools and

Gaelcholáistí. You can get a quote for your school by contacting the schools team at schools@studyclix.ie or (086) 0840 283.

CAN I USE THE JUNIOR CYCLE SCHOOLBOOKS GRANT?

Yes, Studyclix is considered a digital media resource so access for your 1st, 2nd and 3rd years can be covered by the new JC Schoolbooks Grant for 2024/2025.

IF MY SCHOOL CAN'T AFFORD IT ARE THERE ANY OTHER OPTIONS?

Yes! You can use the JC Schoolbooks Grant to cover the cost for your junior students. We also have a Sponsor-a-School programme where local companies can sponsor Studyclix access in your school as part of their CSR commitment. There is also the option to claim a discount code for your school that you can share with students who may want to get access for themselves.

WHY SHOULD THE SCHOOL SET UP STUDYCLIX ON BEHALF OF STUDENTS?

Buying a school licence works out far cheaper than letting students buy for themselves. In addition, a school licence means that teachers know that **all** students in their class have access and can assign work through Studyclix.

SHOULD I GET IT FOR THE WHOLE SCHOOL OR JUST EXAM YEARS?

You can get Studyclix for a single year group eg. 6th years, multi-year groups or the whole school. The price per student is lower the more students in the licence. We develop content that relates to all years. 1st year students can use Studyclix for introductory quizzes per subject and develop their basic study skills through our blog and in-app messages, while 2nd year students are guided through their CBAs with our specialised guides. These resources are often shared with parents by the teacher to help educate them on the requirements of junior cycle project work.

WHAT IS STUDYCLIX BOOST?

We developed Studyclix Boost for **JC & LC Maths** and **LC Biology** by working with some of the best teachers in Ireland, as nominated by students. Boost contains a series of interactive notes and videos that break down each topic into bite-sized chunks that are fully exam-focused. Each subject contains over 200 short videos that can be used as a teaching tool by teachers and for independent revision by students. A Boost upgrade when bought by students is €49.99, but when bought through a school licence is only €25!

“Access for your 1st, 2nd and 3rd years can be covered by the new JC Schoolbooks Grant for 2024/2025.”

DOES STUDYCLIX ACCESS REPLACE THE NEED TO BUY EXAM PAPER BOOKLETS?

Once they move to a Studyclix school licence, many schools no longer require students to buy all their hard copy past paper booklets. Students and teachers can print out any papers they need and downloadable exam booklets are available along with their marking schemes, video solutions and sample answers.

HOW DOES THE SET UP PROCESS WORK?

Studyclix gives you a single multi-use upgrade code to share with the students. Some schools prefer to charge their students a contributory fee in which case you can opt for a spreadsheet of single use codes to give to students as they make their payment. As part of your set up pack, you will also receive posters and communication templates to help you spread the word with students, parents and teachers.

DOES STUDYCLIX OFFER ANY TRAINING?

Yes, all whole school licences include a free online info session for teachers at your next staff meeting. We'll go through how teachers can use Studyclix inside and outside the classroom and how they can encourage the students to use the resource. We also offer a free study skills and info session for students where we show them how to get the best out of their account.

DOES STUDYCLIX OFFER ITS SERVICE IN IRISH?

Yes! You can access all past exam papers for the main subjects categorised by topic as Gaelige. For teachers, the Exam Builder tool can be used to make in-class tests in Irish. We are working on adding more subjects, features and notes in Irish in the near future too.

WHAT ABOUT PARENTS?

Parents are highly motivated to help their child succeed in school but often feel that they don't have the knowledge to properly help their child in many of their subjects.

Parents can access our subject guides to understand the structure of each exam, read our advice for studying certain topics and support their child's learning by watching solution videos with them or working through topic quizzes.

Find out more about Studyclix for schools by visiting our website.



Get your students set up on Studyclix for less

All licences include a Teacher Training webinar at your next staff meeting!



Schools get a discount when they buy Studyclix access for their students.

Number of Students	Plus Access Regular price €49.99	Premium Access Regular price €74.99	Boost Upgrade
A single year group (e.g. 6 th years)	€25 per student 50% discount	€45 per student 40% discount	Available in JC & LC Maths, and LC Biology
Multiple year groups (e.g. 6 th , 5 th , & 3 rd years)	€20 per student 60% discount	€40 per student 46% discount	€25 per student per subject (50% discount)
Whole school <small>*Price dependent on school size. No charge for TY students.</small>	< €15* per student Get in touch. Further discounts for DEIS schools and Gaelscoileanna	€35* per student	

Free teacher access included in all options. Prices are per student, per academic year. Prices include VAT



More than **1 in 3 schools** buy Studyclix directly for their students.

Get study resources, tools and advice for all year groups, **1st to 6th**.

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Luke Saunders



Amanda McGeer

schools@studyclix.ie
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Find out more at
studyclix.ie/school-pricing

★ NEW

Studyclix access for 1st, 2nd and 3rd years can be covered under the Junior Cycle Schoolbooks Grant

Welfare Committee Update



NAPD's Welfare Committee, established in March 2012, is responsible for developing suitable and appropriate guidance documents and resources to assist school leaders in their day-to-day work. A key part of NAPD's brief is to promote the Health and Welfare of Principals and Deputy Principals and it is important to stress that NAPD is the only organisation which is specifically dedicated to that purpose.

The Very Useful Guide (VUG) has been renamed as Cuidiú. All support documentation is now organised into alphabetical sections and contains live links to relevant circulars, guides, websites etc. The majority of the resources in Cuidiú are based on the lived experiences of school leaders who have shared their knowledge and experiences with us, so that the practical advice offered in documents reflects the reality of life at school level.

The following documents have been forwarded by the Welfare Committee for inclusion in Cuidiú since the start of the current academic year:

- Substance Use policies
- Job Sharing policy
- Career Break policy
- Inclusion policy

Shay Bannon Chairperson

- Accident or Incident Record form as prepared by Health and Safety Authority (HSA)
- Updated information on the implementation of the Work-Life Balance Act – copies of available templates, relevant links and the Code of Practice relating to Work Life Balance and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2023 and Parental Leave Acts 1998-2023 have been uploaded to Cuidiú.
- Additional Allianz Legal reviews
- Sustainability – there are 2 websites offering support to schools <https://www.mywaste.ie>, and the Irish Schools Sustainability Network (ISSN). Links to both have been uploaded to Cuidiú. These are a source of further information and guidance for members – enhanced legislative changes for recycling in operation since 1 July 2023.
- New guidance document from the Health and Safety Authority (HSA) entitled *Managing Exposure to Biological Agents in Laboratories*.



SCAN ME



SCAN ME

The Welfare Committee welcomes suggestions and proposals from colleagues about areas where they feel they might need additional help or guidance.

Similarly, members with ideas for policies or procedures that might need to be included in Cuidiú or who would like to contribute to our work in any way, please contact us at welfare@napd.ie

Shay Bannon is Chairperson of NAPD's Welfare Committee





Leaving Certificate Memories

Leaving Cert 1959

John Quinn

(This is the closing part of the script of a radio documentary on my boarding-school days in Patrician College, Ballyfin, Co. Laois. Although written in the third person it is my own story)

THE LAST DAYS - THE LEAVING CERTIFICATE EXAM

Boys who had ambled through school up to now suddenly began to rise at 5 a.m. to study ... and to pray.

"O great St. Joseph of Cupertino, who by your prayers obtained from God that you be asked at your examination the only proposition you knew ..."

In these final days they were accorded independence. There were no more bounds, no more limitations. Billy Daly caught a pike in the lake and almost the whole class dined royally on it. On the eve of the Agricultural Science Exam (more marks than Commerce, better chance of being called to teacher-training ...) Br Joseph brought them for a nature walk across the farm and talked of perennial rye-grass and plantain. He no longer seemed to be Br Joseph, the teacher.

After all the panic, the exam itself seemed incidental.

And then it was all over... he packed his case, cleared out his locker, said goodbye to his pals — many of whom he would never see again. It was June 1959. A decade was ending. A lifetime beginning. His father came to collect him. The car set

off for home. Home. Freedom. No more Latin. No more French — never did French anyway.

Over the cattle grid. 'Goodbye' it seemed to sing. Goodbye to porridge, to the study hall, to dormitories, to a sausage on Sunday.

Goodbye Rosie, Tim, Eddy, Des... it was over. He was free.

Two — four — six — eight

Who do we appreciate?

B-A-L-L-Y-F-I-N

Ballyfin!

He was going home ...

Ne ambulaveritis in horto, pueri ...

No more Latin ...

He was going home. He was happy.

But why was he lonely? Why — was — he — lonely?

POSTSCRIPT

Well, yes ... he did get a call to teacher-training (thanks to perennial rye-grass). What does he remember of the Leaving Cert, 1959? He remembers Br Joseph ... perennial rye-grass ... Rosie, Tim, Eddy, Des ... and the exotic taste of pike.

This text is reproduced with the permission of the author, John Quinn and his publisher Veritas

BALLYFIN – A BOARDING SCHOOL MEMORY

This 42-minute radio documentary, from which the text above is extracted, is his poignant account of John's five years as a boarder in the Patrician College, Ballyfin, Co. Laois in the 1950s. Although written in the third person, *Ballyfin – A Boarding School Memory* is John's personal evocation of boarding school life – his daily routine, the loneliness, the friendships, the annual retreat, the films and the Gilbert and Sullivan productions.

To make the documentary, John revisited Ballyfin to record the authentic sounds of boarding school life, from classroom to chapel, from refectory to playing fields. The documentary is also illustrated with the music and radio archives of the 1950s.

Ballyfin – A Boarding School Memory was first broadcast on November 1992. It won a Jacobs award for best radio documentary in 1993.



SCAN ME

John Quinn's working life has had many iterations – teacher, publications editor, education officer, broadcaster and radio producer. He was the recipient of numerous prestigious radio awards during his twenty-five years with RTÉ.

He is an accomplished author and writer of fiction and non-fiction. John lives in Clarinbridge, Co. Galway

To find a detailed narrative of John's rich contributions to Irish education, publishing and broadcasting scan this code.



SCAN ME

Leaving Cert 1970

Maedhbh Uí Chiagáin

Rinne mise scrúdú na hArdteistiméireachta i 1970. Ait na rudaí a bhfuil cuimhne agam fós orthu breis agus 50 bliain níos déanaí. I don't remember the Leaving Cert as a stressful experience. Mar scoláire cónaithe bhí taithí againn ar gach rud a dhéanamh le chéile – ithe, caitheamh aimsire, codladh agus dar ndóigh staidéar. Idir 80 agus 100 scoláire cónaithe a bhí i gClochar na Trócaire i mBaile Uí Mhatháin i Longfort, ach in aimsir na scrúdaithe ní raibh fágtha ach idir 30 agus 40, so everything was just a little more relaxed.

I remember that we had a picnic at a nearby lake on the Saturday after the first three days of exams, something that would be unheard of during the school term. Our biggest fear in 1970 was that the same thing would happen to us as had happened the previous year's cohort, who had had to sit

some of their papers again just before the end of June because of a leak in some papers.

Rud eile a tharla, is dóigh liom don chéad uair i 1970, ná gur le gráid, A, B, 7rL, seachas marcanna a chuirfí ár dtorthaí in iúl. In those days we aimed for honours, not H1s. A, B and C under this new system would be honours standard, meaning we now only had to reach 55% to achieve an honours grade instead of 60% required by the old system.

Is cuimhin liom gur cheapamar go raibh sé beagán éagórach, nach mbeadh fhios againn riamh go díreach cén marc a bhaineamar amach. Two honours were required for access to University. Not that University entrance was a huge issue because only a handful of us was headed in that direction!

Ocht n-ábhar scrúdaithe a bhí agam, gan ábhar eolaíochta ar bith ina measc. Ba ghnáthrud é sin i scoileanna cailíní ag an am, ach in ár gcás bhí Mata Onóracha ar fáil, rud nach raibh chomh coitianta i scoileanna cailíní. Ceathrar againn as rang de 22 a thóg Ardleibhéal agus bhí ar an mbean rialta a bhí ár múineadh an dá leibhéal a mhúineadh le chéile, not easy when the honours syllabus bore very little relationship to the pass course.

So lots of extra Maths sessions happened during study time, when the 4 of us and Sr. Assumpta worked as quietly as we could in a corner of the study hall. Ag smaoineamh siar air, b'aít gur chaith gach éinne againn, ón gcéad bhliain go dtí rang na hArdteistiméireachta, beagnach an méid céanna ama sa halla staidéir. The only concession to leaving cert students was that after evening tea they could go straight back to the study hall, while the younger students did the cleaning up. The very diligent students rushed back as soon as they had eaten but I don't remember being among this group!

Music students had a significant advantage in terms of escaping the study hall. Music practice and indeed music classes had to be done during the time allocated to study, so every half hour one small group left the study hall to go to the various convent parlours where pianos were available, while another group returned to their studies.

This was a good opportunity for a chat with friends who were practising around the same time, as there was normally no supervision of music practice, unless your music teacher decided to drop in to see how you were getting on.

There was no official career guidance in the late 60s but the nuns had a very good feel for what was a "suitable career" for each student. Being an all-girls school, the options were limited, both by societal and family expectation and by the lack of science subjects.

Bhí an-mheas ar an múinteoireacht agus ar an mbanaltracht mar ghairmeacha do chailíní. Agus dóibh siúd nach raibh suim acu leanúint leis an staidéar, bhí an státshoirbhis, na bainc agus na Comhairlí Contae. Ó bhí mise an-óg, bhí an mhúinteoireacht ar m'aigne agam agus bhí an-suim agam sa cheol.

So the obvious thing was to follow both and become a music teacher. Just at this time a new Leaving Cert subject, General Musicianship, was being introduced in an effort to make music accessible to everyone and there was uncertainty as to how this would be perceived by the universities.

So I was supervised while I wrote a letter to the music professor in UCD to ask his advice regarding my choice of music course. The reply came almost by return! Bhí sé amhrasach ar leor an cúrsa nua mar ullmhúchán do chúrsa ollscoile. Mar sin ba chóir dom cloí leis an sean-chúrsa má bhí sé ar intinn agam céim sa cheol a dhéanamh.

Ó thaobh na scrúduithe féin, sé an páipéar sa bhFraincis a sheasann amach domsa agus a mhúin ceacht dom a d'fhan liom tríd mo shaol sa mhúinteoireacht.

At that time we had no oral exam but the syllabus included a novel and about 15 poems, which we studied diligently. However, when the papers were distributed, we all looked at each other. None of us recognised the poem, *Heureux qui, comme Ulysse*, which appeared on the honours paper that year, so answering the poetry question, which was not optional, was out of the question.

When the exam was over the French teacher, an excellent and very diligent staff member, gathered us all in a classroom to apologise and to teach us the poem! In those days the prescribed poems were published by Folens in a small copybook style book (with notes, of course) and this particular poem had never made it into print.

It was a lesson to me always to study the syllabus and not to depend on the publishing company. Imagine the fuss if something similar happened today. I take my A in French as proof that the Department of Education made allowances for this error on the part of the publishers.

Tá an-chuid ama caite agam ó 1970 i leith ag plé le Scrúdú na hArdteistiméireachta agus ag plé leis na hathruithe éagsúla a tháinig air thar na blianta. Nil aon amhras ach go bhfuil brú ag baint leis agus nuair a chloisim scoláirí an lae inniu ag labhairt faoin mbrú atá orthu, gabhaim buíochas go ndearna mise an scrúdú i 1970.

Maedhbh Uí Chiagáin

Chaith Maedhbh a saol múinteoireachta ag obair i gColáiste Íosagáin, Baile an Bhóthair, i mBaile Átha Claithe, i dtosach mar mhúinteoir ceoil agus ansin mar Phríomhoide ar feadh beagnach fiche bliain. Ó d'éirigh sí as, bhí sí mar bhall de bhoird bhainistíochta i scoileanna éagsúla. Tá sí anois mar bhall den Údarás Rialaithe i gColáiste Mhuire gan Smál i Luimneach agus mar Chathaoirleach ar bhord stiúrtha lontaobhas Scoileanna Éamainn Rís.



Scottish Highers 1968

Ian Robertson

I'm not sure that my mother and father even knew that I was heading out to sit the Scottish equivalent of the Leaving Cert – "the Highers".

Unlike the communal froth – I hesitate to use the word 'hysteria' – that surrounds the Leaving Cert these days, the Scottish Highers were a social non-event, to the extent that

it didn't even make the agenda of any family discussions that were circulating, far less the national press.

I don't say this with a curl on my lips – actually, there is something quite endearing about the communal trauma that is Leaving Cert Ireland. It makes the young candidates of Ireland feel important – and that itself is very important, possibly more so than the exam results.

Part of this communal anxiety no doubt has to do with the exceptionally high second level participation in Ireland compared to long-ago Scotland – and hence the ramped-up competition for precious third-level places. I don't think I ever doubted that I would get my place to study in Glasgow University.

But for sure, had I been a Leaving Cert student in 2024 Ireland, I wouldn't have had a hope of getting into Trinity College Dublin to study psychology, the place where I was lucky enough to end up becoming chair and professor many decades later.

I don't know how Higher results convert to points but when I got my results I was a bit disappointed. That was because I was a swot. At 17 I had to be gently nudged out of the Sea Scouts with my equally socially-retarded friends, none of us having ever talked to a girl, far less having laid trembling lips on a maiden's cheek.

No, my results were unspectacular from my point of view. The B in English in particular stung. I fear I may have got carried away in my essay about a lost dog – the introduction of a political dimension and an, in retrospect, rather strident rhetoric on social injustice might have done for me.

The B in French was also a blow. I had liked all my French teachers – couldn't say that about the English ones, I'm afraid. My particular hero was Benjamin Linda. In moments of tedium, he suddenly would run to the back of the class, climb like Spiderman to the high window overlooking the neighbouring classroom. In his black gown and looking like a giant bat, he would stick out his tongue and pull a face at the back of his colleague below. To this day I can remember the roar of joyful laughter from class 1a next door (I was in 1b – only in writing do I now understand my Higher result).

But a B in Geography? I, who could recite the cotton towns of Lancashire and knew that Duluth was famous for... damn, it's gone now. Our Geography teacher was a charismatic psychopath whose belt sat on his shoulder under his jacket like an FBI agent's gun. He would whip it out faster than Wyatt Earp and wield it savagely. All Scottish belts were made in a Fife town called Lochgelly and they came in wide range of weights and styles – their catalogue was a staple for any new teacher.

I can't remember the Geography teacher's name but I do remember that he told us with certainty what topics would come up in the Higher exam. Naturally, I swotted these topics slavishly. Opening the paper with eagerness – I can't remember the weather that morning, but in Glasgow it was usually raining – my heart sank. Not one of Edgar Hoover's questions was in the paper.

But Chemistry – how on earth did I only get a B in Chemistry? I loved the subject, and adored the magnificent, beautiful

symmetry of the periodic table. I was literally shocked to arrive in school in my fifth year to be told that tiny electrons didn't really spin round a chunky nucleus. But I hung in there and embraced the ambiguity of waves and particles and still feel awe at the periodic table.

But some bastard gave me a B. Why? This is one of the great mysteries of my life.

I still remember the resistance of the stiff envelope as I eased the certificate out of the envelope – B, then B, then another B – ah no, a fourth B – heart-sink territory – all these un-kissed cheeks of a now-wasted swotty adolescence – ghastly... but wait – ah, a silky, beautiful A – Maths – and then a second A – Physics. The only two damned subjects that I didn't swot for!

I went to Germany to work in a lorry factory for the summer and embraced Marxist-Leninism. I still remember my poor mother's face as I returned with shoulder-length hair mouthing absurdities from Mao's little red book.

Soon I was sitting at the back of the first year Physics lecture theatre scowling down at the agents of authoritarian capitalism but secretly buoyed by my A in physics. Then they told us they would give us a test to determine whether we went into the 'Honours' or 'Ordinary' Physics degree class.

The first question was to write the name of the professor of Physics at Glasgow University.

Without hesitating, I scrawled *Yogi Bear*.

That's just one of several reasons I ended up as professor of Psychology in Trinity College.

Professor Ian Robertson of Trinity College Dublin is Founding Director of the Global Brain Health Institute (gbhi.org), a leading researcher globally on the brain's attention systems and an author of several multiply-translated popular science books on the brain, most recently *How Confidence Works*.



Leaving Cert 1988

Patricia Mannix McNamara

Several years ago, certainly before Covid 19, I was driving from a school visit, when I happened to hear a segment about the Leaving Certificate on Newstalk. In an uncharacteristic move, I pulled my car into a lay-by and picked up my phone and texted into the show. My text went something like, "since my Leaving Cert, I have completed a degree, a postgraduate diploma, master's and PhD studies and still if I am feeling under pressure or stressed, I may have a nightmare about facing into a Leaving Certificate exam unprepared." I didn't name my nemesis subject, obviously!

Newstalk immediately contacted me back and asked me to come onto the show, but I didn't feel comfortable to do so. Here I am now, invited to share my memories of the Leaving Cert. Karma.

It is interesting that when I have told that story, people usually respond, quick as flash, with something like Chemistry! or Maths! When I look at them puzzled, they say, "my Leaving Cert subject I still have nightmares about." That tells us something about place that the Leaving Cert exam has in the Irish psyche. Fascinating.

My mother's memory is that I was generally good at subjects, but my reports were always less than positive: "could do better" or "could work harder". She laughingly tells me I was always up for a bit of 'divilment' with whatever was going on (that has not changed I am happy to report).

Deep down however, I did want to do well. I had a deep love of history, encouraged by a wonderful history teacher. It is a joy for me to see my son share such interest in history classes now. I remember coming alive when studying Shakespeare and the metaphysical poets. Love of English literature has never left me.

I can see myself now sitting on the floor outside the glass walls of the exam hall in the uncomfortable school uniform with my memory cards, full of Shakespearian quotations. Why are school uniforms always so comfortable by the way? Is it a clothing plot?

Once the Leaving Cert marathon was complete, I went on to matriculate. Round 2! Thankfully much has changed.

Along with the nervousness that went with the examinations, I also remember excitement, a sense of impending freedom. In some way the Leaving Cert felt like a rite of passage into adulthood. I was both excited about what was to come and in trepidation of the unknown. If I could tell my younger self, "Go for it, it will all will work out fine," I would.

I did well in my Leaving Cert. It opened the door to College where the seeds of scholarship were first planted and continue to grow to this day. One of my most vivid life memories is visiting the College with my mom as I took the first steps towards what I can only describe as an incredible career in teaching.

When I did the Leaving Cert, it felt like there was only one route to further study in College. It felt like the Leaving Cert defined your future trajectory. I am not sure that was wholly true then, but I am glad to see so much has changed and the Leaving Certificate is now seen as one of several routes to career attainment.

As my son is now in senior cycle, taught by teachers who are excited, passionate about their subjects and seek to engage the creativity of their students, I can see how curriculum has changed and how in many ways the terminal exam has stayed the same.

I can see the cycle of life and the passage of time through his examination rite of passage. As we recognise the centenary of the Leaving Certificate exam in Ireland, we also recognise that we are in rapidly changing times. AI will force us to finally come to grips with the changing nature of knowledge construction and dissemination.

I look forward to seeing how we will innovate in response. I also look forward to when my son will see the passage of time for his children (I live in hope), it will show an innovative and responsive approach to assessment that is congruent with the changing nature of our world.

Professor Patricia Mannix McNamara is Professor of Education Leadership at the University of Limerick. A post primary teacher and experienced school leader, she works with a vibrant team in the Education Leadership and Learning Academy (ELLA) at UL. She is a teacher, academic, author and co-host of the popular leadership podcast *Leadership Unwrapped*.



Leaving Cert 1954 David Andrews

I grew up, the middle child of five, in the Dublin suburb of Dundrum, then a small happy safe village, long before the arrival of the big shopping centre. After an all-Irish primary education in Coláiste Mhuire in Parnell Square, I went to Synge Steet for two years, following which I was moved, in 1951, to board at Cistercian College, Roscrea. My father, Todd Adrews, a strong-willed man, knew the Abbott; he felt I was going nowhere and getting poor results in Synge Street.

Around that time my father told me an interesting story. He had been one of Michael Collins "squad" on Bloody Sunday who "went out with others to deal with a particular target"; he wasn't home, much to my father's relief. He opposed the treaty and fought against the Free State army in 1922 alongside Cathal Brugha at the Hamman Hotel and Turkish Baths on Sackville Street in Dublin (to become O'Connell Street in 1924) where Brugha suffered fatal injuries. My father was subsequently excommunicated for IRA activities

Back to Roscrea. Food there was generally good and the place was warm and clean. While I wasn't homesick, I did not enjoy the first two years because of a (unnamed) bullying priest. When he left, he was replaced by Father Aiden Cusack, with whom I got on very well, a kind and decent man who changed all our lives for the better.

I became a prefect in 6th year. Among the many good friends I made was Gus Martin, who later became Professor of Anglo-Irish literature in UCD, who will be remembered for his Leaving Cert poetry anthology "Soundings".

While I have many fond memories of Roscrea, I have no memories of doing much work for the Leaving Cert. I also have no memory of the exams themselves, no late night or early morning cramming or hot sunny days. Unlike today, the exams came and went without much fuss.

Sometime in August results arrived in the post. I remember

my mother being kind-of pleased – "not bad" she said; my father didn't comment, nor did my siblings. I had passed all subjects except for Maths, which I found difficult and didn't study for. Following grinds my mother sourced, I passed it in the Matric a few weeks later. There were no celebrations, no graduations and no get togethers.

I had no career in mind. I'd like to have done medicine but my father wanted me to do law. The compromise was that I would go to Galway and work for my uncle Donnie Coyle, my mother's brother. I spent two and a half years on the road with Hygea selling chemical products to chemists. My uncle then decided I should study chemistry in UCG, which I did for a year. There I played rugby for Galwegians and Connaught and soccer for UCG, winning a Collingwood Cup.

After Galway, I went to UCD and over three years concurrently studied for a BCL and a BL. During the summers I made ice cream in Walls factory and worked for the Hudson Bay Fur Company in London. After I graduated, for a year I taught the children of the Ford car factory workers in Dagenham before returning to Ireland to work at law. In 1965 a new chapter opened in my life when I was elected TD.

Advice to today's young? Take your studies more seriously than I did. And take time out of your studies, as I also did, to seek out new experiences.

[In conversation with the editor]

David Andrews is a former Fianna Fáil politician who held a number of ministerial appointments. He twice served as Minister for Foreign Affairs. On the second occasion, in 1998, he was centrally involved in the Good Friday negotiations in Northern Ireland. He also served as Minister for Justice, Minister for Defence and Minister for the Marine. He was a TD from 1965 to 2002.



Leaving Cert 1985 Linda Doyle

Even though no one in my family had gone to university before me, I always knew that it was my destiny. My parents, despite leaving school early themselves, also took this as a 'given' and were hugely supportive of me. My mum, in particular, really understood the power of education and knew it would open up the world for me.

So, when I look back now at my Leaving Cert year, I can say that it led me along the path to university and, once there, I realised that the world of academia was the world for me.

In secondary school, St Angela's College, Cork, I always felt I wanted to study something in the STEM area, as that is where my interests were. It was only when I went to an Open Day in University College Cork that I came across a discipline called

'Electrical Engineering'. I was instantly smitten. As I write these words now, I feel as though I am writing a descriptive essay for primary school!

But that is how it was; what I heard made complete sense to me. This sudden discovery of something I never knew existed has always stayed with me and now, when we do Open Days here at Trinity College Dublin, I encourage students to keep an open mind. Something may just capture their imagination and that 'something' may not be what they expected.

Though it might sound contradictory, my family's inexperience of the university landscape turned out to be very empowering. At the time, Electrical Engineering required some of the highest points in UCC, but I never felt pressure, only support. And no one ever questioned my ambition. Even more importantly, my family had no preconceived notions about engineering and no one queried whether engineering was a suitable career for a woman.

There is nothing more uplifting than feeling that the world is your oyster and feeling it in a pressure-free way. So, during that Leaving Cert year, the only pressure I experienced was the expectation I set for myself.

Knowing what I wanted gave me a very clear focus and, I have to say, I brought that focus to the Leaving Cert exams. I 'fitted' very much within the traditional secondary school system, and it worked well for me. Very recently, here in Trinity, I did a workshop on communications, led by some of our wonderful students in our Neurodiversity Society.

These bright and talented students face a daily battle of fitting in to a system that is designed for the neurotypical. These were not phrases that were used or understood back in the 1980s, but I was always aware that I did have an easy passage through school. It suited me. While the Leaving Cert was demanding, I loved school, relished the work and the challenges and, I have to admit, I cried profusely on our last day. I found my tribe, so to speak, and three of my closest friends today are friends from back then.

I do feel that I was not just lucky in terms of fitting into the school system but exceptionally lucky in the schools I attended. I think you can't talk about the Leaving Cert without talking about what went before it. My primary school, Togher Girls National School was all I could have asked for in terms of wonderful teachers and support, and this was followed by an equally fantastic experience in St Angela's College on St Patrick's Hill overlooking Cork city.

I hold fast to the belief that education is transformative, and my education at primary and secondary school played a huge role in that transformative experience for me.

Of course, the Leaving Cert itself had its ups and downs. As you can imagine, Maths is a key subject for Engineering. I loved Maths. I had been hoping for a very good result, but I did not have a great Maths exam. I think I had a moment of panic and it just got away from me. I remember feeling very

down about it, but my Dad was so calm and comforting; I got over it and that really steadied me.

I managed to get the grade I needed rather than the one I wanted and, more importantly, I did not let that negative experience affect the other exams. On the other hand, I remember the German exam that year was very easy.

I was lucky to have a number of inspiring teachers in my life – both in primary and secondary school. These were the kind of teachers that make you want to be your very best self and reach for the stars. I do not have a natural talent for languages but our German teacher, Geraldine Quilter, was so amazing that German became a favourite subject of mine and many others in our school.

Her exams were so demanding and challenging that, in comparison, the Leaving Cert exam was no problem at all. Little did I know, several years later, one of my first jobs would be in Munich, where my Leaving Cert German provided a fantastic foundation.

I took for granted that university was open to me and that the Leaving Cert was a way of getting there. By this I do not mean I did not work hard; rather, university was a natural option in a way that it was not for my parents before me. There are many students for whom university is still not an option. Some rule themselves out, not based on lack of academic ability, but because the world of the university seems a pipedream and something out of reach.

In the position I now hold, increasing accessibility to education is one of my core objectives. There are several fantastic initiatives in Trinity to achieve this. I am particularly proud of the work of the Trinity Centre for People with Intellectual Disabilities (TCPID).

The late poet Brendan Kennelly wrote that the function of TCPID is to "*reveal the beauty and promise of a hitherto hidden talent now brought into the light of day and the light of appreciative minds*".

Perhaps that is what third-level education should seek to achieve for everyone.

I am hugely thankful that the Leaving Cert in 1985 was the key that unlocked the door into that amazing, life-changing world for me.

Linda Doyle is the Provost and President of Trinity College Dublin and is the first woman to hold the post since Trinity's foundation in 1592. Linda was previously Professor of Engineering and the Arts. She is a native of Togher in Cork City.





ombudsman
do leanai
for children



The Transformation of Student Voice in Education

Niall Muldoon



ombudsman
do leanai
for children

When the Irish State was established in 1922, children were not individually recognised in the constitution. They were almost invisible.

It has been 20 years since the establishment of the Ombudsman for Children's Office and more than ten years since the referendum on Children's rights passed in 2012, amending the Constitution and addressing that invisibility. Despite this, we still have a long way to go to ensure a child centred approach to public administration, and to guaranteeing that children's views are heard and considered in matters that affect them.

However, the prioritisation of education is one area, which I believe, has resulted in the transformation of Irish society. The Irish State was a world leader, when it made a real commitment to children's rights through the introduction of free secondary education in September 1966. This one change transformed children's lives, whole families and indeed Irish society as it opened up opportunities that otherwise simply would not have existed.

There is no way to overestimate the importance, and positive societal value, of free education in Ireland. However, we also now know that free education is not, in and of itself, a guarantee of equal access for all children.

In order to ensure that all children can avail of free education (Article 28 of UNCRC), and equally as importantly, reach their potential within the education system (Article 29 of UNCRC), they need to be provided with the best education *for them*, with the necessary supports. They also need to be in secure homes with adults who care for them and they need to have sufficient food and nourishment to be able to thrive.

The introduction of free education in Ireland has been extremely successful. We are now in a position where, overall, 92% of children are completing secondary education. However, that figure drops to 86% in disadvantaged areas.

I am now encouraging the Department of Education to focus much more on the 8-14% of children who do not complete second level and figure out if the State is giving them all possible opportunities to reach their potential. Many of the reasons for non-completion can be found in disadvantage and lack of sufficient or appropriate support for children with additional needs (not just educational, but mental health, physical health and social).

In the context of schools and education settings we can address this by making existing structures more inclusive of vulnerable groups of children including younger children,

“ *That dialogue and willingness to allow the students to engage in the decision making created the atmosphere of respect and support that was vital to carry through enormous change.*

children with disabilities, children from ethnic minorities, children from disadvantaged backgrounds and children in care.

It is also important to think about processes that allow children to identify the issues that are important to them, and to provide meaningful feedback on what has happened. That means we need, within our education system to listen to, and trust our children *and* to act on what they tell us

The voice of the child was silenced within education for most of the history of this State, but we are changing very quickly. From chalk and talk, sitting in rows, 2 to a desk, to working in groups and sitting in circles we are starting to see the value of children being heard and inputting to their own education.

This change is being driven by committed and innovative school leaders and teachers. A seismic change also came via the trauma of Covid 19 when the Department of Education, very correctly and very humbly, took advice from the Irish Secondary Students Union around the correct course of action for the Leaving Certificate exams between 2020 and 2023.

That dialogue and willingness to allow the students to engage in the decision making created the atmosphere of respect and support that was vital to carry through enormous change.

That breakthrough was followed by the strong role of students in the development of the Cineáltas: Action Plan on Bullying (2022), which was heavily influenced by the views of children and young people. The Department is now building

on all of that learning by creating a Students Participation Unit and delivering on the Education (Student and Parent) Charter so that the voice of the students can be an integral part of policy making and can be heard around any of the important decisions that will affect them.

This is a groundbreaking development for an education system that, for many years, taught and physically enforced the adage that children should only be heard whenever the teacher decided.

John F. Kennedy once said that *"children are the living messages we send to a time we will not see"*.

It my hope, and I believe that it is very achievable, that the children going through the Irish education system will bring wonderful messages of being heard, feeling involved and being recognised as a partner in their schooling. That is how we will create teenagers and adults who will, in time, value, listen to and welcome the voices of others when they build society into the future.

Dr Niall Muldoon, is Ireland's second Ombudsman for Children. During his tenure, Niall who is a Counselling and Clinical Psychologist, has focused on generating an Ireland where children and young people are actively heard, and their rights respected, particularly those who are most vulnerable.



Carysfort Training College, Blackrock

Opened as a teacher training college in 1903. In 1991 UCD moved its Smurfit Graduate Business School here.

Norman Ashe Collection – 1948-53

Irish and Career Guidance for Teachers and Students

An Chomhairle um Oideachas
Gaeilteachta & Gaelscolaíochta



Aoife Ní Shéaghdha agus Seán P Ó Briain

*“One language sets you in a
corridor for life. Two languages
open every door along the way”*

Frank Smith,
Canadian psycholinguist

*“If you talk to a man in a language he
understands, that goes to his head.*

*If you talk to him in his own language,
that goes to his heart”*

Nelson Mandela

Tugann Aoife Ní Shéaghdha, Oifigeach Oideachais Iar-bhunscoile agus Seán P Ó Briain iar chigire Gairmthreorach na Roinne Oideachais spleachadh dúinn ar an acmhainn nua *Deiseanna Gairmeacha le Gaeilge*.



COGG has worked in close collaboration with Careers Portal /Saoloibre.ie to ensure that additional career guidance resources are available in Irish online and in hard copy. Careers Portal now offers the option of an English or Irish version of all the material presented online; to use the option press the Eng/Ga button at the top of the screen on careersportal.ie. In addition, there is a yearly careers competition in which students can reflect on their work experience and submit a written or digital entry to win some great prizes.

In 2023, COGG published a brand-new resource for immersion education schools, laying out all of the opportunities for careers with Irish. This resource is now available to all schools in Irish and English.

The resource includes tips on how to apply for the many residential schemes for Irish-speaking students at third level

and contains several testimonials from people working in Ireland and overseas about just how positive having Irish has been for them personally and for their careers.

The Department of Education describes the pack as a resource that will enhance whole-school guidance planning and provision in post-primary schools. COGG was particularly pleased that Esther Doyle, Assistant Chief Inspector, officially launched the English version at the IGC Conference in Tralee on 9 March 2024.

The guide covers third-level courses in detail, while also emphasising the importance of apprenticeships, Further Education, tertiary courses, and work placements. It contains separate inserts on the main career and course areas. QR codes and links are provided so that students can research, explore and discover more about the areas in which they are interested.

It is important to stress that the guidance resource will appeal not only to native Irish speakers, but to any post-primary students with an interest in Irish. The information will also be useful for people in employment considering a change of career and/or lifestyle.

This resource is the culmination of extensive collaboration by COGG with Irish language organisations, state bodies, Údarás na Gaeltachta, and the education and training sectors.

CONCLUSION

In schools all over the country, there are students who are interested in Irish and would consider a career with Irish if they were fully aware of the options and opportunities open to them. This guidance pack helps raise awareness of what is available, while also providing pathways for students to research and discover more about their own areas of interest.

The digital version of the resource can be accessed at cogg.ie or CareersPortal.ie or Saoloibre.ie. Hard copies can be ordered by emailing eolas@cogg.ie.

COGG RESOURCES AND PARTNERSHIPS FOR GUIDANCE

- Saoloibre.ie (CareersPortal.ie)
- Comórtas Scileanna Gairme 2024
- Deiseanna Gairmeacha le Gaeilge

AN GHAELGE AGUS AN TREOIR DO MHÚINTEOIRÍ AGUS DO SCOLÁIRÍ

Bíonn comhoibriú bliantúil idir COGG agus Careers Portal/Saoloibre.ie i dtaca leis an gcomórtas lar-bhunscoile - Comórtas Scileanna Gairme. Is deis iontach é seo do scoláirí na scileanna a d'fhoghlaim siad le linn taithí oibre a chur in iúl i bhfoirm scríofa nó físe agus bíonn sárduaiseanna le buachan!

D'fhoilsigh COGG acmhainn chuimsitheach úrnua don Treoir in 2023, *Deiseanna Gairmeacha le Gaeilge* agus tá leagan Gaeilge agus Béarla den phacáiste ar fáil ar COGG.ie agus ar [Careers Portal.ie](http://CareersPortal.ie) (saoloibre.ie). Is féidir teacht ar chóipeanna crua den acmhainn trí theagmháil a dhéanamh le eolas@cogg.ie.

Tugann an acmhainn nuálach seo léargas ar an réimse leathan deiseanna gairmeacha atá ar fáil le Gaeilge agus trí Ghaeilge agus tá bileog eolais faoi leith, dírithe ar na rannóga éagsúla ar fad san áireamh, m.sh. Gairmeacha le Gaeilge agus Oideachas, Gairmeacha sna Meáin, Deiseanna sa Statseirbhís agus sa Seirbhís Phoiblí, Gairm san Aistriúchán, Gairmeacha sa Ghaeltacht agus in Eagraíochta Gaeilge.

An aidhm atá leis an acmhainn nua ná eolas a scaipeadh i measc scoláirí agus múinteoirí maidir leis an iliomad deiseanna éagsúla atá ar fáil do lucht labhartha na Gaeilge. Seo an chéad uair a bailíodh eolas chomh cuimsitheach agus chomh tarraingeach le chéile in aon áit amháin ar

chúrsaí tríú leibhéal agus ar dheiseanna trí Ghaeilge. Lena chois sin, tá eolas ar dheontais agus ar scoláireachtaí, ar shaol na hollscoile trí Ghaeilge agus ar rogha printiseachtaí agus breis oideachais trí Ghaeilge nó a bhaineann le saol na Gaeilge agus na Gaeltachta.

FOCAL SCOIR

Mar chomhairleoir treorach, b'fhiú go mór duit cóip den acmhainn seo a bheith agat sa seomra ranga le roinnt ar scoláirí a bhfuil suim acu sa Ghaeilge! D'fhéadfadh sé a bheith an-chabhrach duit chomh maith an pacáiste seo a scaipeadh ar mhúinteoirí Gaeilge na scoile ar mhaithe le cur chuige treorach uile scoile a chur chun cinn.

I dteannta a chéile is fearr sinn chun na scoláirí a chur ar an eolas faoi na deiseanna iontacha ar fad atá ar fáil go forleathan anois le Gaeilge!

TACAÍOCHT DON TREOIR:

- Saoloibre.ie (CareersPortal.ie)
- Comórtas Scileanna Gairme 2024
- Deiseanna Gairmeacha le Gaeilge

Aoife Ní Shéaghdha was appointed as Post-Primary Education Officer with COGG in January 2023. She has over 20 years of experience working in third level education in the teaching of Irish (UoG, UCC) and pursuing research in the field of language planning and all-Irish and Gaeltacht education.



Ceapadh Aoife Ní Shéaghdha ina hOifigeach Oideachais lar-bhunscoile le COGG i mí Eanáir 2023. Tá os cionn 20 bliain de thaithí aici ag saothrú i ngort an oideachais tríú leibhéal i mbun theagasc na Gaeilge (OÉG, COC) agus ag gabháil do thaighde i réimse na pleanála teanga agus an oideachais lán-Ghaeilge agus Gaeltachta.

Seán P Ó Briain is a former Post Primary Inspector of Guidance with the Department of Education. He has spent many years teaching Irish, French and English in post-primary schools in and on the European continent. He has also considerable experience working as a Guidance Counsellor in Ireland. He is a part-time lecturer on the MSGC programme for guidance counsellors in DCU.



IarChigire Treorach sa Roinn Oideachais is ea Seán P Ó Briain. Chaith sé blianta fada ag múineadh Gaeilge, Fraincis agus Béarla in iarbhunscoileanna in Éirinn agus thar lear, agus tá a lán taithí aige ag obair mar Chomhairleoir Treorach in Éirinn. Is léachtóir páirt-aimseartha é ar an gcúrsa MSGC do chomhairleoirí treorach in Ollscoil Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath.



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Travellers in Education

Hannagh McGinley & Elaine Keane

INTRODUCTION

Irish Travellers are an indigenous ethnic minority who fare poorly on every indicator used to measure poverty. They make up less than 1% of the Irish population. The Equal Status Act 2000 defines the term 'Traveller community' as the community of people who are commonly called Travellers and who are identified (both by themselves and by others) as people with a shared history, culture and traditions including, historically, a nomadic way of life on the island of Ireland (Equal Status Act 2000, Section 2 (1)).

Since the formation of the Irish State, Traveller participation and progression across the continuum of education is a cause for great concern. While the reasons for this poor participation and progression are varied and complex, this trend of poor participation in education needs to be understood within the context of the long history of racism experienced by communities like the Traveller community (Bhopal 2011).

Historically, Travellers were often educated in segregated school or classroom settings, where it is reported that they had poor educational experiences in terms of how they were taught and treated (Hourigan and Campbell 2010). This legacy of intergenerational educational trauma has caused a lot of harm and mistrust and has impacted on how many Travellers currently experience and engage with the education system (McGinley 2024).

Anti-Traveller racism is often regarded as an almost 'acceptable' form of racism and evidence suggests that racism towards Travellers is rife in Irish society (MacGreil

2011). This reality also pertains to schools, where Traveller students report high levels of racial bullying and discrimination (cf. Devine, Kenny and MacNeela 2008; Boyle, Hanafin and Flynn 2018).

PARTICIPATION RATES

While there is almost full participation by Traveller children in primary schools, and a high transfer rate of Travellers to post-primary education, attendance and retention rates at post-primary level remain problematic (Watson, Kenny and McGinnity 2017). Data from the Central Statistics Office (CSO) shows that Travellers cease their education on average 4.7 years earlier than those in the general population and that only eight percent of Travellers in Ireland had completed their education to Leaving Certificate level in comparison to 73 percent of the general population (CSO 2017).

Consequently, very few Travellers reported completing higher education. In 2011, only 115 Travellers reported having completed higher education (CSO 2012). This number rose to 167 by 2016 (CSO 2017). The most recent CSO figures relating to Travellers in education have yet to be published. Travellers were a central focus of the extended National Access Plan (NAP) (2015-2019 into 2021) to widen participation in higher education (HE) (DES 2019).

According to the latest NAP (2022-2028), there has a modest increase in the number of Traveller new entrants and enrolments over time. In terms of new entrants, the number has increased from 23 in 2011/2012 to 48 in 2019/2020, with

a subsequent decline to 33 in 2020/2021 (likely due to Covid 19). Traveller enrolments have increased from 77 in 2011/2012 to 119 in 2020/2021. The 2022-2028 NAP aims to increase the current number of Traveller new entrants from 33 to 150.

SCHOOL EXPERIENCES

While there is a relative dearth of research about the experiences of Travellers in school in Ireland (Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) 2019), there are a number of key studies inform the context (cf. Lynch and Lodge 2002; Devine, Kenny, and MacNeela 2008; Hourigan and Campbell 2010) particularly in recent years (cf. Boyle, Flynn, and Hanafin 2020; Quinlan 2021; McGinley and Keane 2021, 2022; Dupont 2022).

While Traveller students tend to engage well at primary level and report having positive experiences therein, they often find the transition to post-primary difficult because of the lack of support available (Quinlan 2021). Traveller students commonly report feeling a lack of belonging in school, and of being 'unwanted' and unsafe (ibid), and, particularly as teenagers, perceive significant cultural differences between themselves and their settled peers (Hourigan and Campbell 2010; McGinley and Keane, 2022).

In a government study into the effectiveness of anti-bullying procedures, Dupont (2022) researched the views and experiences of 71 Traveller and Roma pupils, as well as parents and teachers. While most of the students reported that they liked school, 15 percent reported being bullied in the past year by their peers or by their teachers, 'with name calling, racist name calling, exclusion, and bullying by teachers' (ibid. p. 54), along with low expectations, most frequently cited. Dupont also reports 'ample evidence' of multiple forms of discrimination, particularly in relation to the Traveller pupils, and notes that these experiences played a key role in their attendance and decision to leave school early.

In a study about the enactment of intercultural education in a highly diverse DEIS school with a high concentration of disadvantage, McGinley and Keane (2021) noted the cognisance of the Traveller and non-Traveller minority ethnic students of the reason for their school's poor and 'tough' reputation as it was regarded as 'the school for the Travellers and the Blacks'.

Furthermore, research examining the experiences of Travellers in education has found that Travellers report finding the current curriculum irrelevant (Connolly and Keenan 2002). In spite of this context, and despite their own reported negative experiences of school, Boyle, Flynn and Hanafin (2020) found that the Traveller parents in their study were considerably optimistic about their children's education.

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

Despite the existence of very little data on achievement by ethnicity in Ireland, research shows that Traveller students attending DEIS schools have very low scores in English, Reading and Maths standardised tests in comparison with the general population and 'other' minority ethnic groups (Kavanagh, Weir and Moran 2017).

It is estimated that almost half of all Traveller students attend non-DEIS schools (Darmody, Byrne, and McGinnity 2012). We know little about the academic achievement of this significant cohort of Travellers.

UNDERSTANDING EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING - PUSH AND PULL FACTORS

In the research literature on Travellers in education, explanations for early school leaving are usually framed within the context of 'push' and 'pull' factors (Derrington 2007). The 'pull' factors usually identified reference 'cultural norms', such as, the tendency to marry young and the lure of the Traveller economy (Bhopal and Myers 2016). These factors tend to be gendered and it is often suggested that Traveller girls leave to get married while Traveller boys leave to enter the world of work.

Additionally, nomadism has been identified as one of the key reasons for Travellers' poor attendance at school and low achievement levels (Cudworth 2018) despite the fact that most Travellers can no longer practice nomadism. While a considerable number (18.2 percent) of Travellers are still living in mobile homes or caravans (All Ireland Traveller Health Study (AITHS) 2010), most are not mobile. While the Traveller Accommodation Act (1998) obliged Local Authorities to provide Travellers with transient sites (legal temporary stopping places), the lack of overall provision has ensured that Travellers have no real means of practising nomadism. Furthermore, 'pull' factors do not explain why Traveller children are



leaving primary school unable to read and write and long before they are getting married or entering the world of work.

Research has found that early school leaving amongst Travellers is more likely due to 'push' factors. The 'push' factors identified in the literature include being subjected to racism and racially motivated bullying from both students and teachers; the irrelevance of the curriculum; low teacher expectations; and exclusion (Bhopal and Myers 2008, 2016; Bhopal 2011, McGinley and Keane 2021, 2022).

Traveller students do not have a 'chip on their shoulder' as evidence suggests that what they report experiencing is true. Kavanagh (2013) found that while teachers were empathetic towards Travellers, they often failed to recognise the inherent racism in non-Traveller parents asking teachers to move their children away from Traveller children. While teachers are often empathetic towards Travellers, they tend to adopt a cultural deficit lens and to blame Travellers for the inequalities that they experience (Quinlan 2021; McGinley and Keane 2021, 2022; Kavanagh 2013). Tormey and Gleeson (2012) found that 42 percent of the 4,970 post-primary school students that took part in their study reported high or very high levels of 'social distance' from Travellers. Lynch and Lodge (2002) reported that three-quarters of the post-primary school students participating in their study believed that Travellers would not fit in to their school.

Those who believe that Travellers leave school because of 'pull' factors tend to adopt a 'cultural deficit lens' and blame Travellers for the educational inequalities that they experience. When inequality is viewed through a 'cultural deficit lens' individuals from disadvantaged communities are blamed for their own 'shortcomings' as opposed to focusing on the impact of wider structural social inequalities (White 2014). When people employ a 'cultural deficit lens', they tend to engage in discourses which blame the victim while denying their own complicity in any wrong-doing (Miller 1995).

POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS

The absence of Traveller history and culture in the school curriculum is a factor contributing to Traveller students' perceptions of curriculum irrelevance and in feelings of not belonging (Bryan 2012; Deuchar and Bhopal 2013). Following the Irish State's recognition of the Traveller community as a distinct ethnic group in March 2017 (Houses of the Oireachtas 2017), the 'Traveller Culture and History in Education Bill 2018' was introduced in the Seanad.

The Bill aims to provide for the inclusion of Traveller culture and history in the curriculum in State schools within the framework of the 1998 Education Act. On foot of the introduction of the Bill, in September 2018, the then Minister for Education and Skills, Richard Bruton (TD), requested the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) to undertake an audit of Traveller culture and history in the curriculum.

The Minister asked that the audit would consider "the place of Traveller culture and history in the existing curriculum, from early childhood to senior cycle; the current intercultural education guidelines and other resources for schools in relation to Travellers; and the opportunities for teaching about



Traveller culture and history and how it is incorporated into existing curricular subjects" (Minister's letter, 2018 as cited in NCCA 2019, p. 4).

The Traveller culture and history in the curriculum: a curriculum audit (NCCA 2019) made a number of recommendations to support work on Traveller culture and history in early childhood and school settings.

As an important first step in responding to the audit recommendations, the NCCA (2023) published a Traveller Culture and History: Research Report.

The report provides an overview of what is currently known and has been recorded regarding the different aspects of Traveller culture and history. It will be used to inform the review and redevelopment of curriculum specifications and the development of new specifications as part of ongoing work across sectors. It will also provide a basis for the development of resources and materials for teachers and other educational practitioners, and it will also inform the thinking around intercultural approaches to education more broadly. In order to support this work further, the NCCA has committed to publishing examples to support the teaching of Traveller culture and history across all levels in the near future.

While this is an important development, Kavanagh and Dupont (2021) rightly note the difficulties associated with 'additive' curricular amendments, including, for example, issues of tokenism, and the danger of not critically attending to the role of teachers (including in terms of their positionalities) in perpetuating inequities. Further, it is clear that careful and critical continuous professional development for teachers will be required to ensure that Traveller culture and history are taught in an appropriate and sensitive manner (McGinley 2020).

CONCLUSION

The educational disadvantage experienced by Travellers is rooted in wider structural inequalities of poverty, racism, and oppression. While 'education cannot compensate for society' (Bernstein 1970), schools are critically important sites given



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their potential role in contributing to societal cohesion. As noted, there have been a lot of important and positive developments in the area of Traveller education.

While it is important to acknowledge these developments and remain solution focus, given the current baseline data regarding Traveller participation and progression in education, it is evident that a lot more work needs to be done to address 'the educational debt' (Ladson-Billings 2006) owed to the Traveller community.

Dr. Elaine Keane is Associate Professor and Director of Doctoral Studies in the School of Education at the University of Galway, Ireland. Her research focuses on social class and education, 'race' and ethnicity in education, teacher diversity, and constructivist grounded theory (CGT) and she has published widely and has led national and international projects in these areas.



Elaine was lead editor of the Routledge (2023) book about diversifying the teaching profession. She is Co-Editor of *Irish Educational Studies*, serves on the Editorial Board of Teaching in Higher Education, and is Convenor of the Educational Studies Association of Ireland (ESAI) Special Interest Group on Teacher Diversity Research. Elaine has taught expert workshops on CGT throughout Ireland and internationally and is lead editor of the Routledge International Handbook of Constructivist Grounded Theory in Educational Research (2024).

Dr. Hannagh McGinley is an Assistant Professor in Education at MIC Thurles. She is a member of the Irish Mincéir/Pavee (commonly referred to as Travellers) community and an early school leaver. Her research expertise is Traveller education, anti-racism, and culturally responsive and intercultural approaches to education.



Her previous roles have included post-primary school teacher and community development practitioner. Dr McGinley also worked as an Education Officer at the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) where she was responsible for advancing the recommendations of NCCA's Traveller Culture and History in the Curriculum: A Curriculum Audit.

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Draft Leaving Certificate Biology, Chemistry and Physics syllabi

Cause of serious concern for School Leaders

Declan Kennedy

INTRODUCTION

In December 2023 draft specifications* (syllabi) in Leaving Certificate Biology, Chemistry and Physics were released for consultation by the NCCA. It has been proposed by the Minister that these three new syllabi will be introduced into schools in 2025.

A short period of consultation was allowed and feedback had to be submitted to NCCA by 23 February 2024. The Irish Science Teachers' Association (ISTA) submitted a detailed report to NCCA pointing out some major problems with these draft syllabi. The ISTA report reflected the views of the 648 science teachers who attended CPD events organised by the ISTA and 317 Science teachers who completed a detailed ISTA questionnaire. The ISTA report was written by the Biology, Chemistry and Physics committees of the ISTA and is available online at <https://ista.ie/ista-report-to-ncca-feb-2024> (ISTA 2024). Whilst it is recognised that school leaders are extremely busy people, it is strongly recommended that each school leader should, at least, read the Executive Summary of the report.



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Figure 1:

Report submitted by ISTA to the Minister for Education and NCCA

This author represents the Irish Universities Association (IUA) on the NCCA Leaving Certificate Chemistry subject development group. There are two representatives of school leadership on each NCCA subject development group: one representative for the Joint Managerial Body and one for the Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools. This author is not aware of any submission made by these representatives to NCCA on the implications of the three new Leaving Certificate Biology, Chemistry and Physics syllabi for schools. Hence, it is hoped that this article will give an outline of the problems raised by the ISTA and IUA and initiate discussion on the implications of the introduction of the three new syllabi into our second-level schools.

The ISTA report captures the voices of Science teachers in schools throughout Ireland. In addition, the views of teachers were reinforced in an IUA survey of university colleagues in Biology, Chemistry and Physics university departments. This report is available online at <https://www.iua.ie/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/IUA-Report-re-draft-NCCA-LC-Biology-Physics-Chemistry-Specs.pdf> (IUA 2024). Many of the problems highlighted by the ISTA were also highlighted in the IUA report.



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The feedback obtained from secondary school science teachers will now be summarised under various headings and, where relevant, excerpts from the IUA report will also be included. In each case, a small number of direct quotations from teachers will be included to illustrate the type of comments made by teachers. A wider range of more detailed comments may be found in Chapter 7 of the ISTA report.

**Note: In this article the term "syllabus" and "specification" will be used interchangeably as the term "syllabus" has great clarity and is the more commonly used term at international level.*

1. ALLOCATION OF 40% TO THE RESEARCH INVESTIGATION FOR SCIENCE SUBJECTS IS EXCESSIVE

One of the major problems with the three draft syllabi is the decision by the Minister for Education to allocate 40% of marks to a research investigation or coursework component (referred to as an "additional assessment component") to be carried out by students in sixth year over a period of 20 hours out of the total of 180 hours of class contact time allocated to teach each syllabus. Teachers pointed out that this percentage is far too high for Science subjects and will put enormous pressure on students and teachers.

As a chemistry teacher with 30 years experience, I am open to any change which is for the good of my students, but this is not it. It will only put more pressure on students who are already overwhelmed with the content of most senior level subjects. It is obvious to most teachers that the current JC programme is not working in terms of the impact of CBA's – talk to students and parents and it is clear it is very stressful and not having a positive impact on their learning. Yet we are about to do the same to our Leaving Cert students. As a teacher and as a mother, I am becoming very disillusioned and disappointed with the new system. Change is necessary but not like this. Someone needs to start listening to the teachers and students on the ground.

The proposed time allotment is 180 hours with 20 hours for the additional assessment component research Investigation. 40% being awarded for 11% of the time is completely skewed.

40% is much too high a percentage. This will only cause anxiety and stress among students preparing for a high stakes exam.

The majority of teachers (60%) in the ISTA survey felt that an allocation of 20% to the coursework was their preferred allocation. The second most common allocation (chosen by 29% of teachers) for the additional assessment component was an allocation of 10%.

2. ADDITIONAL STRESS ON STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

A common theme running through the responses from teachers was the additional stress and anxiety that will be placed on students and teachers.

I think the level of stress this will place on students would be immense, particularly since the investigation is overlapping with other practical/oral examinations. Any student who may take more than one Science subject will be overloaded with work and therefore neither subject's assessment will be a true representation of capabilities had more time been afforded. This may lead on to a decrease in selection of more than one science subject due to workload.

The new Junior Cycle was a terrible mistake which the Dept just went ahead with while ignoring the genuine concerns of the teaching professionals. I would not like to see this situation arise again where they ignore the professionals in the classrooms to blindly implement this new system. This will put pressure on resources and will add lots of extra work on the class teacher to prep students for the assessment.

The line given in the media is these changes are to reduce stress for students whereas introducing all these projects will do the exact opposite ... If students have 3, 4, 5 projects as well as orals and written exams to do, stress levels will sky rocket.

3. LACK OF RESOURCES IN SCHOOL SCIENCE LABORATORIES

The majority of teachers (82%) felt that their school laboratories did not have sufficient resources to support their students in completing the additional assessment component research investigation, Figure 2.

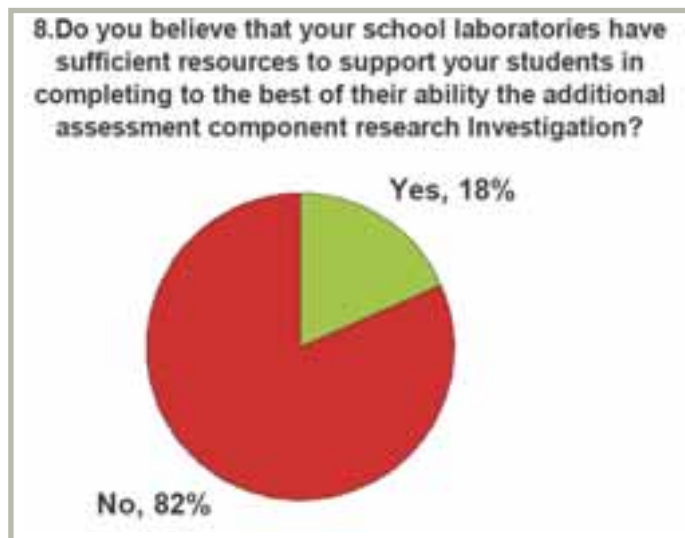


Figure 2:

The majority of teachers do not feel that their school laboratories have sufficient resources to support their students in completing the research investigation. Some typical comments made were:

We have five labs, currently in 5th year we have 3 biology classes, 2 Agricultural Science classes, 1 chemistry and 1 physics. There is not enough equipment to cover everyone or to fully stock each lab.

We will not have enough equipment for the large number of senior Science students in our school, especially if they will be working on individual projects which will tie up equipment. Storage of their project work may also be difficult

We are not well equipped enough to have 24 Individual Leaving Certificate Chemistry experiments being carried out at the same time.

Students completing a research investigation will also suffer by not having the equipment they need on a regular class basis and this will negatively impact their results.

4. DIFFICULTY OF TIMETABLING ACCESS TO SCHOOL SCIENCE LABORATORIES

Many teachers expressed concern about getting access to school laboratories for carrying out the research investigations and lack of storage areas to leave projects set up. Analysis of the responses highlighted a number of themes emerging, e.g. less practical work having to be carried out at Junior Cycle and Transition Year level, timetabling implications as students will have to be moved out of laboratories to facilitate Leaving Certificate project work, implications of teacher availability for students who wish to participate in BT Young Scientists' Exhibition and the perceived rush to introduce the new specifications in schools in 2025 without schools being adequately equipped.

If all 4 LC Science subjects have individual project components there is no feasible way to facilitate it. We have 2 prep rooms, one is entirely taken over with Ag Science projects. No prep/storage for another 100 projects.

We do not have enough labs for all groups to be in the lab for all periods, especially not at the same time. Currently we run CBA1 during the mock exams as it is the only time we can free up enough labs for 2nd year CBAs. I don't know how we will manage if all 6th year biology and chemistry and physics students are to do six weeks of a practical project at the same time.

Other classes may have to lose out on laboratory times in order for the research part to be carried

5. LACK OF LABORATORY TECHNICIAN SUPPORT AND INCREASED WORKLOAD FOR TEACHERS

The lack of laboratory technicians to assist teachers with laboratory organisation and management as well as provide backup support to students undertaking projects was highlighted by many teachers. The huge increase in workload could make the profession of science teaching less attractive and could exacerbate the shortage of science teachers.

We have a dedicated laboratory technician, 4 labs with equipment in each and 2 prep rooms. The equipment is linked to current practical requirements, so any new practicals or practicals students devise for their assessment we will not be equipped for.

No lab technician in a school of 1200 students. We also don't have near adequate equipment for regular equipment never mind any fancy equipment. Really concerned about this.

Impossible to carry out without funding for labs and provision of lab technicians.

The Irish system of teaching without the assistance of a lab technician in a secondary school is totally unacceptable. All these additional projects without technical support will push Science teachers from stretched to burnt out very quickly. We are expected to do two jobs in this role - we need to be allowed to focus on quality teaching, rather than being side-tracked with the work of a technician also.

6. HEALTH AND SAFETY CONCERNS

The report of the Irish Universities Association highlighted the Health and Safety implications of the investigative projects model proposed in the draft specifications:

It is clear that considerable funding would have to be provided to schools which are inadequately equipped. In addition, laboratory technicians would have to be appointed to schools – the majority of schools do not have them at present. At third level, in a laboratory of 24 students, it is common practice to have two laboratory tutors present and also the assistance of a laboratory technician. How can one expect a single teacher to manage this huge workload on their own? The Health and Safety implications are considerable and risk assessments need to be carried out for each individual research investigation project. (IUA 2024, p. 28)

The number of students who sat for the Leaving Certificate Physics, Chemistry and Biology examinations in 2023 is summarised in Table 1

Subject	Number of students
Biology	34,602
Chemistry	9,750
Physics	7,526
Total	51,878

Table 1

In addition, 7,460 students sat the Agricultural Science examination. Thus, if the new Biology, Chemistry and Physics syllabi are implemented in 2025, this would mean that approximately 60,000 Leaving Certificate research projects would have to be carried out in school laboratories throughout the country. This will place enormous pressure on students, teachers and school leadership.

Comments from teachers also highlighted their Health and Safety concerns:

I don't see how one teacher can oversee a class of 20-24 students all doing individual projects - if the Dept of Ed want this type of work to be done in schools they can fund lab technicians.

24 students in a class working on different projects with different apparatus - the logistics of managing multiple different experiments simultaneously is an impossible task for the science teacher. This difficulty is already evident in the Junior Cycle CBAs.

How does one teacher supervise 24 individual Chemistry Experiments at one time? Who will prepare the chemicals for the projects (many schools do not have lab technicians) and who will pay for the equipment? In terms of safety again, 4 students at one desk completing 4 different investigations using different chemicals, how can safety be guaranteed?

7. WIDENING OF THE SOCIAL DIVIDE

The effect of the research projects on widening the social divide was mentioned by many teachers.

This is going to create a huge divide between children from different backgrounds. It hugely disadvantages students from lower social class backgrounds who will be relying solely on a teacher who is trying to get their heads around the chemistry of 48 projects at the same time. While students with parents who have a background in this will be able to go home and parents will complete the work for them happily. Parents will do anything to increase the amount of points a student gets, even if they don't know the information themselves, they will find (or worse pay for) people who do know the science.

We do not have lab technicians like the private schools

8. ADVERSE EFFECT ON UPTAKE OF LEAVING CERTIFICATE BIOLOGY, CHEMISTRY AND PHYSICS

Many teachers predicted that the introduction of lab-based research projects will adversely affect the uptake of the Science subjects.

I have students who are also studying Design and Communication Graphics, Computer Science, Home Economics, Agricultural Science, PE, all of which include a project element. This will add yet another project to students who are already overloaded with coursework. There are students choosing subjects based on the time commitment required for projects with some attempting to avoid them entirely

I also personally think that it will reduce the number of students taking physics for leaving cert as students will reduce the number of science subjects that they take because of the concurrent project load. I think the model of a project and exam reduces the fundamental teaching and therefore learning of the student

I think a 40% project will make students less likely to choose science for LC as it's too daunting to take on. If the project was worth 10 or 20%, I feel they would see it as a positive thing.

9. EXPERIENCE OF AGRICULTURAL SCIENCE RESEARCH PROJECTS

Agricultural Science teachers who completed the ISTA survey spoke about the difficulties being encountered by students and teachers in carrying out the project work for Agricultural Science ("Individual Investigative Study").

As seen in Ag Science, numbers have fallen due to the intensive nature of the IIS. Students are now choosing subjects carefully to manage their time and avoid overload on so called project work (DCG / Economics / Construction) and not necessarily choosing their favourite subjects. Will numbers studying the Sciences fall?

Having been involved with students in the completion of the Agricultural Science IIS I feel the workload on the teacher will increase and that covering this extra module will put a strain on already limited resources.

From working with students on their Ag Science projects, it is clear that they struggle massively with the research aspect of the project.

10. RESEARCH INVESTIGATION MODEL IS UNSUITABLE AND IS OPEN TO CHEATING

Unlike the assessment model used in subjects such as languages and music, the model proposed for the Science subjects does not directly assess any laboratory practical skills. Instead, the model simply involves assessing what has been written into a proforma template document that will be forwarded to the SEC. Many teachers commented on the fact that much of the material to be written into this proforma document can be written with the aid of Generative Artificial Intelligence. Recent research presented at the ISTA Annual Conference by Dr Ryan Gallagher and Stephen Murphy provides evidence that this is the case for Leaving Certificate

Agricultural Science and Leaving Certificate Computer Science. University lecturers also made this point in their submission to the NCCA (IUA 2024).

Among the comments made by teachers were:

The Leaving Cert is a high stakes exam. As an experienced JC examiner, I am very familiar with the difficulty of ensuring that Coursework was indeed the candidate's own work. With developments in AI, this will become an even bigger issue.

As a member of the community in which I teach, I would find it very difficult to tackle the issue of plagiarism via AI. That is, it is difficult to prove its use (unlike other forms of plagiarism). I would worry of the potential implications of accusing a student of this sort of plagiarism on my relationships with students and parents.

These are not university students. They have not developed adequate research skills to complete this work independently. Little time allocated to help student develop such skills.

11. VAGUENESS OF LEARNING OUTCOMES IN DRAFT SYLLABI

A detailed analysis of all learning outcomes in the three draft syllabi was carried out by the ISTA. The IUA studied the findings of the ISTA and confirmed its agreement with the ISTA. The percentage of learning outcomes that lack clarity is summarised in Table 2 (IUA 2024).

Subject	No. of learning outcomes	No. of learning outcomes that lack clarity	% of learning outcomes that lack clarity
Biology	99	66	66.7%
Chemistry	127	40	31.5%
Physics	101	69	68.3%

Table 2

Unless the lack of clarity in so many learning outcomes is addressed, this problem will increase the stress on teachers and students in preparing for the Leaving Certificate examinations in Biology, Chemistry and Physics.

12. LACK OF CLARITY ON MANDATORY LABORATORY PRACTICAL WORK

On average, almost 90% of teachers reported in the ISTA survey that, on reading the draft Biology, Chemistry and Physics specifications, they were unclear on what mandatory laboratory investigations should be carried out by students in school laboratories. An average of 96% of teachers was in favour of a list of mandatory student laboratory investigations being included in the final draft of the Physics, Chemistry and Biology specifications. Details of the mandatory laboratory practical work proposed by ISTA are given in the ISTA report. Unless these details are supplied in the final draft, this problem will add to the stress and anxiety of teachers and pupils as they struggle to understand what laboratory practical work is needed to achieve the relevant learning outcomes.

13. IMPORTANCE OF MAKING SCHOOL LEADERS AWARE OF IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROPOSED RESEARCH INVESTIGATIONS IN PHYSICS, CHEMISTRY AND BIOLOGY

Many science teachers pointed out the importance of making school leaders aware of the implications of the proposed research investigations in Physics, Chemistry and Biology

Principals and school leaders should be required to attend consultations or have formal briefings as to what is changing and the implications for timetabling, refurb work, budgeting and AEN student placement. I know I have highlighted this directly but the tokenistic, hands-off approach of school managers when curricular change is implemented-is simply astounding.

Lab work is already diminished due to lack of labs. Curriculum changes need to be implemented with directions to school management and ETB directorate that the business of teaching and learning is the business of schools and appropriate funding and equitable timetabling practises need to be rigorously employed – this ensures some attempt to address rampant inequity of science experience for all students and teachers.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

It is clear that the introduction of new syllabi in Biology, Chemistry and Physics has major implications for school leaders, teachers and students. The allocation of such a high percentage of 40% to coursework (additional assessment component) involving a laboratory-based research investigation is wholly unsuitable for Leaving Certificate science subjects. This decision is not based on any sound educational principles and will lead to increased stress for teachers and students, place huge pressure on laboratory resources and timetabling of access to school laboratories. In addition, the lack of laboratory technicians in most school will increase the workload of teachers and give rise to serious Health and Safety concerns as teachers struggle to supervise a wide range of laboratory investigations all being carried out at the same time. This could have the effect of making teaching a less attractive profession and exacerbate the current teacher shortage in the science subjects. Health and Safety concerns were also highlighted by university colleagues.

Different levels of support available in DEIS schools and fee-paying schools will widen the social divide. Teachers predict that the research projects will have an adverse effect on the

uptake of Leaving Certificate Biology, Chemistry and Physics due to the increased workload for a high-stakes examination. The negative experience of research investigations in Leaving Certificate Agricultural Science is a forewarning of what could happen in Leaving Certificate Biology, Physics and Chemistry. The readily available Artificial Intelligence software packages means that the model of a research investigation is open to cheating

In addition to the problems outlined above, there is a major problem in the Leaving Certificate Biology, Chemistry and Physics draft specifications due to the vagueness of many of the learning outcomes and the lack of clarity on mandatory laboratory practical work. Teachers also emphasised the importance of making school leadership aware of the problems that will be caused by the introduction of the three new syllabi.

It is hoped that the issues outlined in this article will encourage school leaders to become actively involved in ensuring that the many problems highlighted by ISTA, IUA and other submissions made to NCCA are addressed and rectified prior to the introduction of the three new Leaving Certificate Biology, Chemistry and Physics syllabi. A clear set of recommendations has been made by the ISTA (ISTA 2024) and IUA (IUA 2024) on what needs to be done before the syllabi are introduced into schools.

The following comment made by a teacher summarises the many concerns of teachers very well:

We need a more specific set of learning outcomes. We need a list of mandatory experiments. We need a reduced % for the project. We need to see samples of projects. We need to see the proposed booklet students would use. We need to see how it will be marked. It is unrealistic to have this unprepared syllabus coming into schools in under two years time.

Declan Kennedy graduated from UCC with an MSc in Chemistry and a Higher Diploma in Education. He subsequently graduated with an MEd and a PhD in Education from the University of York, UK. He spent over 20 years teaching science in Coláiste Muire, Cobh, Co. Cork before his appointment as senior lecturer in Science education in UCC.



Leading in Times of Crisis

Zachary Walker

The last few years have presented what seems like one major crisis after another. Covid. Energy inflation. Financial crisis. Housing soaring. Russia and Ukraine. Israel and Hamas in Palestine. It can seem overwhelming for everyone and we, as leaders, are often looked to for reassurance, support or direction. In many communities, school leaders are seen as spokespeople and leaders beyond the school doors. It is not easy but one of our jobs as leaders is to assuage discomfort for others. Here are some things I have learned about leading educators through crisis.

1 – Simplify

In the last few years in our department, we have purposely simplified everything we do. Initially, it was to transition to online delivery during Covid. Now, we are focusing on brilliant basics because of the financial crisis and world conflict. In times of turbulence, it is important that leaders actively assist people in going back to the basics. Our focus is on keeping connected to our colleagues, making sure they are okay and have what they need to deliver lessons. No extras, no flash, no additional tasks – we simply make sure each staff member is supported and has the basics to deliver quality instruction.

2 – BUT Overcommunicate

When Covid started, we began a department newsletter each week that was titled “The Least You Need to Know”. Information was coming at us fast and furious and we saw a need to communicate in the most simple, direct way possible. We took it on ourselves as leaders to filter out the extra “noise” and provide our team with the most basic communication necessary to do their job well.

We also found it important to communicate those main points ten times more than we thought necessary because people’s emotional attention is pulled in other directions. We now realise that when we are tired of hearing about something, we are probably just getting started. Repeat to remember and remember to repeat.

3 – Check in with specific individuals

The most recent conflicts have impacted our colleagues differently. But for each of us, when life gets hard, the most important thing to know is you are not alone. One of the things I do in my own leadership practice when a new crisis arises is to start by reaching out to individuals that I know may be impacted, letting them know I am available to listen if they have anything they need to share.

I simply ask privately, “Are you okay”? I don’t share my perspective or offer anything other than an opportunity to share how they are doing. A note, a phone call, a text message – any method of letting people know you are thinking about them – often is all it takes.

4 – Only comment on your core

We have all seen schools, companies, and individuals make statements in “support” of a cause or movement because they were getting pressure from certain individuals within their organisation. As leaders, we also need to be very careful about what we say publicly because our words may have disproportionate power.

Speaking publicly or making statements on sensitive topics can backfire for two reasons: 1) We may not fully understand the complexity of the cause, particularly with issues that can involve multiple “truths” and in which no one side may be “right”; and 2) indicating a willingness to speak about one controversial or high-profile topic can lead to an expectation that we will speak to other causes that someone cares about or that are currently in the media.

Our job as educational leaders is to make our workplace as healthy as possible, focusing on creating and supporting an environment where all individuals feel they belong and are fully respected when speaking their truth.

5 – Be patient and kind with yourself, too

Our job is to support and protect every member of our group, but this can be challenging if we neglect our own well-being. Take time to ask yourself if you are okay – and listen to the answers. Your body may be answering by not sleeping well; your emotions may be answering as you find yourself feeling vulnerable or on edge; your head may be answering if you do not have the clarity of focus you need.

All that is understandable. In times of crisis, it is especially important to be patient with yourself, take an occasional “time out”, and make sure to give your mind, body, and spirit space to breathe, too. You will serve others best when you are taking care of yourself.

And remember to be patient with yourself if you are not always at your best. We are all learning to navigate the world together.

PS – I would love your feedback on these articles. Please do reach out to z.walker@excelanconsult.com if there is anything you want to share or have suggestions for future articles. Thanks!

Zachary Walker is the Head of Department for the Department of Psychology and Human Development (PHD) at the University College London Institute of Education (IOE). He is a Senior Fellow with the Higher Education Academy. Zachary is recognised as an expert in individual and organisational learning performance. In the last ten years, Zachary has worked with educators and policymakers in more than 30 countries on learning, inclusive leadership and innovative practice. He also enjoys frozen yoga, tackle chess, and wrestling with rhinos.

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BRINGING IT ALL BACK home

Yvonne Lucey

After four years in St Mary's University Twickenham in London I graduated with a degree in Physical Education. At that time, permanent jobs were hard to come by at home in Cork so I stayed in England, securing my first post in Kent.

I enjoyed my first job. The school had over 1,500 students and had excellent PE facilities. As PE was an exam subject in England, I only taught PE, which for me was a dream job. After my first year, I secured another job closer to where I was living in Kent.

The school was a smaller, mixed school situated in one of the most deprived areas of England and brought significant challenges. It was in this job that I secured my first in a series of promotions, firstly as Head of Girls PE and then as Year Head. I then went on to become Key Stage Three Manager, basically having responsibility for all of the Junior Cycle students; this role brought numerous other responsibilities which have stood me in good stead across the course of my career.

In 2008 I became an Assistant Principal with responsibility for Student Wellbeing. In the English context, this included whole school responsibility for behaviour, attendance, child protection and pastoral care. In this role I had a team of ten staff to manage daily, these included five teachers and seven support staff who assisted me in conducting my duties.

For me, the hardest part of that role was as Child Protection Officer. I witnessed some harrowing individual cases – the lesson I learnt in that role was that you never know what is going on behind closed doors; always be vigilant for any behavioural changes in your students.

In 2010, I became Vice Principal in a Sponsored Academy. The level of accountability and target setting was enormous; it seemed I was having to produce written reports on a weekly basis. It was during this time that I engaged in a mandatory Headship course provided by the National College of School Leaders.

The course was eighteen months in duration and gave me a great insight into headship. On completion, I was awarded a National Qualification in Professional Headship. In 2013, I secured my first Headship of a Catholic school in the Midlands that had been placed into 'special measures' by Ofsted, six months prior to my appointment.

This job meant I had to move my whole family from Kent which was a huge personal adjustment. The hours were long and the challenges tough, but the rewards came. On taking up the position, it was discovered that the school was heading towards a three-year funding deficit of £850,000. Funding is allocated differently in England, so it meant I had to make significant staffing cuts and I undertook a major staffing restructure over the course of eighteen months.

This led to some difficult conversations with staff. As the school was in special measures, we were monitored rigorously by Ofsted, I recall on my second monitoring visit being eleven staff short and having supply staff covering all these lessons, recruitment was difficult, but I took the decision to have supply cover the lessons instead of employing teachers who I felt were not good enough.

This strategy was supported at the time by the lead inspector, who was the lead inspector throughout my journey until the school was removed from special measures. Eventually I did recruit successful candidates to the vacancies. The school was removed from special measures in February 2015, enrolment improved and recruitment, while still challenging, became easier. The monitoring regime also lessened with the removal of special measures and in July 2016 the school was judged to be moving towards being judged a 'good' school. The school was also selected to be part of the *Parliamentary Review in Education* owing to the turnaround.

The categorisation of schools according to inspection criteria in England I believe is a flawed system. I hope the Inspectorate in Ireland resist from going down that route.

I always knew I wanted to return home to Cork one day, and, in the summer of 2016, I took a leap of faith and embarked on that journey. I was appointed Principal of Regina Mundi College in Cork. It's a single sex, all-girls voluntary aided secondary school with 560 students, with a unique in that the school is privately owned, so we have a Board of Directors instead of a Board of Management.

I think it's fair to say that the staff were sceptical and nervous of me at first when they heard I was 'coming from the UK'; that presented some early challenges. I think I was mindful and respectful of that when I was appointed. I am here so long now my past career seems irrelevant.

The first thing that struck me when I returned home was how dedicated teaching staff are here in Ireland, which is not to say they aren't in England. There is more trust here placed in teachers' ability and leaving them do what they do best, teach. Our system is less prescriptive.

In England it is so driven by accountability and targets that the job has become onerous, with little job satisfaction and often too many decisions are made according to data. While there is a more relaxed approach here and a lower stakes accountability regime, staff work tirelessly and are extremely committed.

I feel there is a better work life balance here. I hope this isn't eroded with the increase in accountability measures here in recent years and I hope the education system here doesn't become all about data driven targets.

Since 2017 some of the changes that have been enacted by Irish policymakers make me nervous that the education system is slowly moving from lower to higher stakes accountability. That aside, I feel most changes have been for the school's betterment.

On reflection in writing this article, I would not have changed my time in England. I undoubtedly honed the craft of teaching, given the contexts and opportunities I was given. The good things I see in the English context are that schools have a lot more ancillary staff to support the operational running of the school.

For example, Science, Home Economics and IT Technicians are normal for every school to have. There are far more administrative staff taking that burden away from teachers and school leaders. However, with levels of accountability proving detrimental to the profession, there is zero job security within the English context.

The positives in the Irish context begins with how payment of teachers' salaries is centrally controlled. This ensures equality in pay which is not always the case in England - this causes tension amongst staff. Where pay increments are automatic in Ireland, that is not the case in England, they are awarded based on performance, meeting agreed set targets. I feel that the inspection regime in Ireland is more collaborative; inspectors have a more human centred approach as opposed to a distant and performance driven approach.

The negatives about the Irish system centre around the number of educational reforms over the last number of years. I would hate the Irish government to lose sight of what actually makes the Irish system work as well as it does. The volunteerism I witness, not just in my own school, but in others is phenomenal and to lose that because of greater bureaucracy and accountability would be a shame.

I believe there is more job satisfaction amongst the teaching profession here. Schools have greater autonomy in England. I find certain elements here are still centrally controlled, albeit from a distance. Centralised systems limit your ability to progress your school as you see fit for the best interests of your students in your context.

To conclude, no system is perfect. There are pros and cons to both. I would not return to England now, but I am grateful of my time there and the experiences I was afforded.

Yvonne qualified as a PE teacher in the UK where she completed an M.Ed in 2009. She is currently completing a PhD in UCC. She has taught for 25 years; for 20 of those years she was part of a Senior Management Team, being Principal for the last 10 years, in both England and Ireland.



According to Yvonne, her greatest achievement is leading a school out of special measures in England and being part of the Parliamentary Review in Education.



I completed my PGCE in Geography in Lancaster in 2009/2010. I then moved to London and worked until 2018 at Elizabeth Garrett Anderson School, a challenging inner-city school, in Islington. EGA School is an "Outstanding" all-girls, comprehensive school for 11- to 16-year-olds. During my time at EGA, under the Headship of Jo Dibb, it became one of the most successful state comprehensive schools in the UK, earning widespread media attention.

I held many different roles including Head of the Geography Department, Head of the Humanities Faculty, Duke of



Me with Year-11 form class at EGA in 2016.

Edinburgh Co-ordinator. The most significant leadership experience I gained was in my two years as the Head of the Humanities Faculty where I managed 13 staff members across 6 subject departments (History, Geography, Religious Education, Sociology, Business Studies and Economics).

I returned to Ireland in 2018 and worked for 3 years teaching Geography at Trinity Comprehensive in Ballymun. I also worked a lot on behaviour interventions, as well as taking on the role of the Academic Scholarship Coordinator.

My time at Trinity Comprehensive was pivotal in my career, as it gave me my first experiences in an Irish setting and further fuelled my passion for working within DEIS contexts. Under the leadership of Francis Neary, it is a thriving, dynamic school that the people of Ballymun trust with the care and education of their children.

In 2021 I was appointed Deputy Principal at Clogher Road Community College in Crumlin, a small, but expanding, DEIS school under the patronage of the City of Dublin ETB, with a working relationship with Educate Together.

Under the leadership of Lesley Byrne, the school has become an innovative, trauma-informed school that places the most recent national and international thinking, practice and research at the heart of planning and practice.

With 9 years' experience in England and now 5 years in Ireland, I have some observations about what works well in England that we could try replicate in Ireland - and what works well here that is missing from England.

WHAT WORKS WELL IN ENGLAND?

Accountability in Staff Performance

In the UK, teachers have an appraisal meeting each year, in which they reflect on targets set the previous year and then become involved in setting targets for themselves for the year ahead. In EGA school we had 3 targets each year. One focused on attainment and exam results; one related to your review against the National Teachers' standards/your role of

responsibility; one target was related to the School Development Plan.

Back to Ireland I really missed my annual appraisal meeting, having targets to guide my practice throughout the school year, to ensure I was always revisiting those targets throughout the year.

I feel that teachers here would value time dedicated to professional development and growth. I have valuable line management weekly meetings with AP1 and AP2 staff. However, teachers without additional responsibilities do not get the same level of support or focus on their professional development. The space for professional conversations around teacher performance is often reduced to difficult conversations when something has gone wrong, or feedback after an interview for a Post of Responsibility. Neither of these situations is conducive to positive, proactive professional coaching of staff.

Lesson Observations

Having a colleague observe your lesson is common practice in the UK. There was an open-door culture at EGA. We regularly had educators from our own school, from other schools and from other countries come to see us teach.

Once Nicky Morgan, then Secretary of Education, on a visit to the school, popped in to see me teaching a lesson on river flooding. This culture ensured that there was constant peer learning taking place, with casual observations, as well as official observations linked to staff performance.

The casual observations made the official observations much less daunting. I would love to see peer observation, as well as official observation, become common practice here. I found it astounding when I returned to discover that lesson observation was not part of the job interview process.

As leaders in Ireland, we hire teachers without ever having seen them teach. We can go a whole year without seeing some of our teachers teach a lesson. Teaching is our bread and butter and we as leaders are not seeing enough of it.



Me with Year-11 Prom class at EGA in 2016.

Staff Moving Between Schools

The situation with CID status being attached to the school where teachers work, I feel has a detrimental impact on the opportunities staff have for working and gaining experience in different schools and different contexts and settings.

Staff fears over their CID status forces teachers to stay in jobs, sometimes for their whole careers, when they are unhappy, when they have long stressful commutes and when they have become stuck in a rut or in a comfort zone. I would love to see staff free from this fear and able to take more risks in their careers, moving to different schools, sampling different academic contexts.

Including my two PGCE placement schools, I have now worked at 5 different schools, all of which were different, which gave me hugely different experiences which have helped me grow and develop as an educator and as a leader.

Middle Management Structure

The lack of middle management positions in Irish schools has a huge impact on staff development and places a massive strain on the senior leadership team. The role of Head of Department in The UK is a significant, paid Post of Responsibility. I loved being Head of Geography at EGA.

I had a small department of two full-time staff and two part-time staff, which gave me an easy introduction to managing people in only the third year of my career. The opportunity to lead a department in terms of curriculum development also gave me invaluable experience of working on School Development Plans.

Such middle management roles allow senior leaders to develop leadership capacity in their staff and also allows senior management to delegate and not get caught up in the minutiae of the school day. More middle management roles will lead to better future senior management leaders.

What's better in Ireland

The stress and pressure of Ofsted inspections has been recently highlighted following the death of Head Teacher,

Ruth Perry, by suicide after her school's Ofsted inspection. "One-word" Ofsted inspection classifications thankfully do not exist here; instead, we have much more nuanced and supportive inspection reports.

Work-life balance and staff and student well-being is much better in Ireland. At Clogher Road and Trinity Comprehensive we have a half day every Wednesday, allowing teachers to get involved with extra-curricular activities and get home to their friends and families earlier.



Summer holidays are significantly longer here, which allows for the proper re-charging of batteries.

In many English schools the Head of Department plans and creates resources and expects the members of the department to deliver them even if they wished to do their own plans and lessons. Teachers here often have much more classroom autonomy.

Barry Hurley attended Skerries Community College, in north county Dublin. He did a degree in Natural Science at Trinity College, specialising in Geography and graduating in 2007. He always wanted to teach but took a two-year break after College. During that time, he worked for the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland on the Greener Homes project. He commenced teacher training in the UK in September 2009.



Have you worked abroad – would you like to share your experiences and observations with colleagues?
Our contact details are on the editorial page.



Oreo – Glenties Community Dog

Brendan O'Mahony



Let me introduce you to our newest member of staff here at St. Columba's Comprehensive School in Glenties, Co. Donegal – Oreo, our Community Dog. Oreo is the first Community Dog in Donegal and only the 14th provided by Irish Guide Dogs to schools across Ireland. We feel very fortunate that Irish Guide Dogs approved his appointment in our school in July of last year.

The idea to bring a Community Dog to our school started a couple of years ago as a result of conversations between myself and a colleague about therapy dogs I had seen being used very successfully in schools in the UK. Our conversations snowballed over time into an application to Irish Guide Dogs for a Community Dog.

I was unaware at that time, that in addition to providing people with Guide Dogs to assist those who are visually impaired, the charity Irish Guide Dogs also provide Assistance Dogs to families with children who have autism and Community Dogs to work as an education or therapy aid in schools.

From our earliest consultation and assessment meetings with the staff at Irish Guide Dogs, I was struck by how controlled the interactions are with Community Dogs. While they are "at work" in schools, Community Dogs are on a lead and under the control of their handlers. Students, staff and visitors must ask permission from Oreo's handler to say hello and all the interactions are calm and controlled. Oreo was chosen as a Community Dog for his temperament – he is a social dog with

a very gentle disposition. Three of our staff were trained by Irish Guide Dogs as handlers and Oreo lives full time with one of those colleagues.

Oreo is only allowed to work with students for a maximum of four periods per day to ensure that he does not become burnt out. He spends his remaining time resting in designated spaces within the school – he has an enviable work life balance. He is a "working dog" with his own timetable based on student needs, but when he is at home, he enjoys a fantastic social life with daily walks and interaction with other dogs.

Since his arrival, Oreo has had a significant impact on our school community, particularly for some of our most vulnerable students. Oreo has become a key part of the learning process and he can assist in a range of ways.

Some students spend their break or lunch times grooming him and reinforcing his training, which reduces their anxiety

“ For students with barriers to learning who do not want to come to school, Oreo will meet and greet them in the morning and help them attend school. For some students he is the reason they come into school each morning. A session with Oreo is a real highlight on their timetable.



and stress levels. Other students will take Oreo for a walk with a handler so it provides the student with a movement break and helps them to regulate their emotions and manage their behaviour. He will sometimes lie beside a student while they sit in their classroom, which brings a sense of grounding and comfort for those who need this support.

For students with barriers to learning who do not want to come to school, Oreo will meet and greet them in the morning and help them attend school. For some students he is the reason they come into school each morning. A session with Oreo is a real highlight on their timetable.

We have recently opened our first autism and multiple disability classrooms and Oreo is a wonderful addition to the supports we can provide our students. Some of our students have made a very strong bond with him over a short period of time.

Oreo was two years old last December and as one of the most popular members of staff, he was spoiled rotten!

I really want to shine a light on the wonderful work of the charity Irish Guide Dogs and I would encourage any school curious about Community Dogs to contact Irish Guide Dogs about their application process and discover what might work best for your students.



All the staff at Irish Guide Dogs have been very helpful and supportive throughout this process and we can't thank them enough for trusting us with Oreo – he really is a very special addition to our school community and are very thankful to have him.

Brendan O'Mahony is Principal of St. Columba's Comprehensive School, Glenties, Co. Donegal.



CBC Monkstown (centre)

In 1949 the Christian Brothers purchased the estate of Monkstown Park which had most recently been occupied by the 'Protestant' Corrig School. At the top right is the Sacred Heart Convent School for girls which was established in 1945 and closed in 1977.

Norman Ashe Collection – 1948-53

FREELANCE LEADERSHIP

Take the Leap, Take the Lead

Marieke Van Tienhoven

Almost twelve years ago, in 2012, I embarked on a personal quest and left my home country, the Netherlands, for Egypt.

Up to that point, I had been working in secondary education (starting out as a French teacher) and gradually found my way into leadership. I absolutely loved it. However, at the age of 33, I found myself looking for alternatives, a different life, as I was convinced the world had a lot more to offer than a career in education.

There was much more to experience than I had until then. I sold my car, stored my belongings, gave up my house and set off with two suitcases to become a dive instructor.

After a year, I discovered that my calling was not to be a dive instructor for the rest of my life, but that my heart lies in education, as it always has. I stayed in Egypt, but went back into education and worked in 3 different international schools (Canadian, English, German).

Nevertheless, the experience brought some dormant elements of my personality to the surface: the taste for travel, seeing other parts of the world and the notion that it is entirely possible, even in the field of education, to make conscious choices about one's life. I decided to take the leap and take the lead in my own life.

I realised that, yes - I wanted to work in education, but no - I did not want my whole year to be based on the educational calendar. I wanted more freedom to decide where and when I work, but especially when I do not, to accommodate my taste for travel, to discover and live other experiences.

All of the above and my innate curiosity combined with a need to learn new things and my love for variation in life, led me to the decision to become a freelance leader, predominantly in secondary education.



Traditionally, when freelance leaders started working in schools in the Netherlands, they were usually recruited to implement drastic change; sometimes they were seen as the bearer of bad news, as it was often their assignment to introduce cuts and reorganize personnel and expenditures. As a result, their reputation was relatively bad, they would only come in when something was seriously amiss in a school.

Over the past decade however, freelance leaders in education have become a more common phenomenon in the Netherlands. In part, this is because schools are not always able to find new Principals, Vice Principals (or Deputy Heads these days). Not only have these positions become increasingly demanding (therefore warranting a very thorough and sometimes long procedure to appoint a new leader), we are also experiencing an increasing shortage of leaders in education.



Schools do not always immediately find a new candidate to replace a leader who retires or finds a new job. This way, an assignment for a freelance leader can last from 3 months (it will finish upon completion of the recruitment process) up to two years sometimes, if there is a need for consistency and long-term change.

Still, freelance leaders are also asked to come into a school to bring about a new course of action, a change, to give a specific incentive to professional culture or to get a stuck process moving again.

In my current experience, the nature of the assignment often is a combination of filling the gap (and sometimes support residing leadership in a school) and a specific goal; many schools appreciate the benefit of a fresh pair of eyes of an experienced leader who is not part of the "old" school culture. As such, the freelance leader has a unique perspective who can help the school and the leadership of a school find the blind spots, the mixed messages, the inconsistencies between written policy and lived professional reality, the limiting elements of certain communication styles or habits, the strong points and of course the potential as well.

If a school is willing to learn and look in the mirror, a freelance leader can be a valuable temporary addition to the leadership team.

So, is it only bliss to hire a freelancer or to be one? For both parties, the school and the freelance leader alike, there are tradeoffs to consider.

For schools, fees and work redistribution need to be considered. Often a freelancer will not work fulltime due to the matter of fees or availability, and will have a specific focus. This means that certain tasks might have to be delegated to other employees in the organisation. Similarly, a new person, especially in leadership, always changes the dynamics in the status quo. A school needs to be ready to accept this.

For the freelancer, there is the risk of not having the next assignment secured - it's an insecurity that one needs to be able to deal with. Additionally, since the assignment is often relatively short, it means that a freelancer must be able to get a good grasp of the main themes in a school relatively quickly

and take into consideration that building relationships needs to happen fast.

On a personal level, a freelancer needs to be able to work fairly individually, as they're never entirely part of the team. Additionally, one of the most important qualities of a (freelance) leader is to be able to trust the future and therefore to trust a new assignment will come along.

For me, becoming a freelancer has been a great journey in terms of personal development, leadership development and learning to take the lead in my working life. As I decide which assignments to take, I'm also able to venture out of leadership positions.

I am currently working as a programme manager for the Dutch equivalent of Ireland's NAPD, Schoolleiders VO, and will start a position as quality management consultant in a secondary school in two weeks alongside that.

This will take me into summer holidays. After that ... who knows?

Marieke van Tienhoven has a Masters in Romance Languages and Cultures and in Education. Working as a freelancer in education has allowed her to focus on different leadership themes such as leadership development, personal leadership skills, change management, professional development in a changing reality and inner development goals.



She is currently investigating how new frameworks can bring leadership into the future by collaborating with international partners via the Presencing Institute. Marieke is also a diver, singer, music producer and an underwater photographer.



Ger O'Sullivan

2024

Coláiste Chiaráin's individual and group success in the 2024 Young Scientist Exhibition last January has been a special time for our students, staff and wider school community.

It was an exciting (and emotional) day for me as Principal and father. As I sat through the awards ceremony with mentor teacher Edel Farrell, we watched with excitement and pride as our students were awarded a total of 6 awards, thus achieving the distinction of Best School in the Republic of Ireland.

It was an incredible feeling to be in the arena as my son, Seán, was announced as the overall winner. It is a privilege for any Principal to see any of their students achieve such an award; add to that the pride and emotion of witnessing one of your own family being announced as the overall winner, making it a very memorable day.

The 12 months prior had been filled with highs and lows, success, failure, obstacles and a determined work ethic from Seán. This was his fourth time competing at the BTYSTE competition. He had a group category win in 2020 and was placed third in the Intermediate individual category in 2023. Leaving the arena last year, he was inspired by the students he met and had a resolve that he wanted to do even better for 2024.

I had reminded him that he would not be competing in sixth year and like to think that this motivated him. He has dreamt of winning BTYSTE for a number of years and through hard work and determined effort he applied himself to try to make that a reality. With his project 'Verify Me', Seán captured the attention of the public and the judges with his novel solution to what is a very real problem relating to authorship verification in this new world of AI we find ourselves in – and its implications across so many sectors.

It feels like 5 minutes ago that Seán and his sister were running around our driveway at home doing coke and mentos experiments and into everything as 3- and 4-year-olds.

The sense pride and achievement that the entire BTYSTE Team has brought to our school has been remarkable.

This year, seven of our students represented our school at BTYSTE, with a total of six projects. We were deeply proud to have achieved six awards this year - Seán, Aiden, Taha, Miles, Amina, Ruben and Lili. Their collective efforts have written a new chapter in our school's history.

BTYSTE for me, is not just a showcase for Science and Technology, it is a showcase of wonderful students from every corner of the country, all of whom represent themselves and their schools with pride and passion. Again,





As a past member of the NAPD Executive, it was poignant for me that the Best Overall School award was sponsored by NAPD and presented by Director Paul Crone.

this year, I had the opportunity again to learn about so many projects from the students themselves, each of whom deserve to be celebrated in their schools. The skills and competencies that students develop through BTYSTE are remarkable.

Using a "bus" analogy – as school leaders we are all committed to getting the right people on the bus and even better if we can get everyone into the right seats. In Coláiste Chiaráin we are so fortunate to have an amazing BTYSTE lead mentor teacher, Edel Farrell. Edel is not only on our BTYSTE bus - year on year she is driving the bus and for the past 16 years she has mentored so many students bringing them on new and exciting journeys of discovery, learning and success.

In 2014 Edel was recognised by BTYSTE by winning the Educator of the Year Award. Ten years later we are incredibly proud of her achievement in mentoring our students to achieve the award of Best School in the Republic of Ireland.



Great credit is due her and all the mentor teachers in our schools who give voluntarily of their time, inspire our students and lead them to great heights.

In Coláiste Chiaráin, STEM education and Innovation across all areas of our school is a key priority for our leadership team. This is reflected in our state-of-the-art STEM Lab and the integration of STEM across both junior and senior curricula. We are fortunate to have a team of teachers across the wider STEM areas who work together to create an ecosystem that encourages participation and provides opportunities for our students.

In the week after our homecoming, we took the opportunity to capture this historic win for our school with a whole-staff photo with our 2024 BTYSTE students. I have seen first-hand the impact that so many of our teachers have in inspiring our students be it in drama, performance, writing, fostering a love of Maths, Science, nurturing practical skills, coding, communication, confidence building etc

As a past member of the NAPD Executive, it was poignant for me that the Best Overall School award was sponsored by NAPD and presented by Director Paul Crone. It was a lovely link between NAPD and our school.

BTYSTE provides a wonderful opportunity for all of our schools and students. I would like to acknowledge the professionalism and kindness of Mari Cahalane, Head of BTYSTE, as she has guided us through this rollercoaster experience.

Like every Principal, I take great pride in my school, approach every day with optimism and am committed with a passion and drive that is both personal and professional. I feel privileged to be in this role as we enjoy these memorable times.

I also have had the joy of celebrating this journey with Seán and my family, providing special times, which will live long in our memories.

Ger O'Sullivan is Principal of Coláiste Chiaráin, Croom, Co. Limerick and father of Seán O'Sullivan, overall BTYSTE winner 2024. He served on the NAPD National Executive from 2010 to 2015 and again in 2022.





VerifyMe – in my own words

Sean O'Sullivan

When I was announced as winner of the BT Young Scientist and Technology Award last January, it didn't quite feel real. My project was something I worked towards over the last 12 months.

I have been inquisitive since I was very young - making Lego sets, completing puzzles, doing experiments and making various projects. I got into 3D printing when I was 12. Through primary school, I was exposed to very basic programming apps; in secondary I was introduced to Python, HTML, CSS. At home, I make projects with Arduino and use my 3D printer. I have partaken in many STEM related competitions including BTYSTE, VEX Robotics, CanSat, Computational Thinking Challenges and more. Last year in CanSat, our team represented Ireland in the European finals in Granada, Spain.

I have entered the BTYSE for the past four years. In second year, I entered with one of my friends with a project titled "*Investigation into the effectiveness of school COVID-19 Cleaning Protocols*". We came first in our category of junior group for the Chemical, Physical and Mathematical Sciences category; we were also awarded a special award from the Irish Research Council.

The following year, my sister and I entered into BT with a project entitled "*ClimateActionHow.com*" - developing a website providing small actions to help fight climate change.

In the following year, my project was "*Investigating the viability of micro-level wind generation*", where I explored the effectiveness of different wind turbine designs in outdoor and

wind tunnel testing conditions. I came third in my category of intermediate individual and also won the Greencoat Renewables Award.

This year my project was called "*VerifyMe, a new approach to authorship attribution in the post-ChatGPT era*". In this project I created a system where, given past examples of any author's writing and then a new check piece, my system can accurately decide whether or not the pieces were written by the same author, by comparing the writing styles of each.

Inspired by ChatGPT's exponential growth, it looked at how current AI content detection systems can easily be bypassed, through paraphrasing techniques or extensive obfuscation techniques, or simply instructing the generative AI model to mimic another author's style.

VerifyMe is designed to differentiate human authors. I found that while seven of the most popular AI content detection systems, when instructed to mimic an author's style, were ineffective when tested against OpenAI's GPT-4, VerifyMe maintained the same accuracies throughout, since it is designed to deconstruct writing styles and differentiate human authors.

VerifyMe could be applied to educational institutions, Colleges and Universities, possibly law, anywhere where it would be preferable to verify authentic writing rather than AI-assisted writing. As these Large Language Model AI systems continue to evolve at an exponential pace, author verification will become even more important.

VerifyMe was created for this specific purpose.

After the announcement, I was led to a room where some of the past winners greeted me and congratulated me on my win. It was very special to meet Tony Scott, one of the initial founders and John Monahan, the first BTYSTE winner as well as many more past winners that evening.

It has been an incredible experience, with much media interest. We were given a tour of the Dáil and Seanad, as well as presenting to the Science Committee. I was invited as a special guest to OpenAI's *Welcome to Ireland* launch. In addition, I was honoured to be selected as the grand marshal for recent Limerick St. Patrick's Day Parade.

Next September, I will present VerifyMe at EUCYS, the European Competition for Young Scientists, in Poland. Meantime, I will continue to develop it and build greater functionality.

AI is going to be transformative, with a massive revolution in personalised learning experiences. It has the potential to completely change all of the perspectives that we hold to our traditional approaches of teaching, which largely have been unchanged since the industrial revolution. It will be able to dynamically match the ability of every student that it is teaching, and not just assign more work to students that are

more capable in certain subjects, but rather continue to make it interesting and allow them to learn faster.

I think that there should be a lot more research put into implementing this in formal education systems, especially given the rate at which it's developing. Many of my teachers in school, for example, and teachers nationally, are not yet aware of ChatGPT and its potential.

And, I think that it's developing so quickly that it's very difficult for anybody outside of the AI area of interest, to keep up with the developments. It has the potential to completely transform how we view education.

Outside education, AI is going to touch every aspect of life – effectively it is going to be another revolution. All technology has the potential to be dual use, but I think that regulation is what will ensure that, for the most part, it is used for the most positive and beneficial applications.

However, we need to be careful that our regulation doesn't constrict or stop development in AI related research. Artificial intelligence is going to change every aspect of our lives; it's important that we get this right.

Overall, I am excited for what the future holds.

LIKE TO SEE AI IN OPERATION?

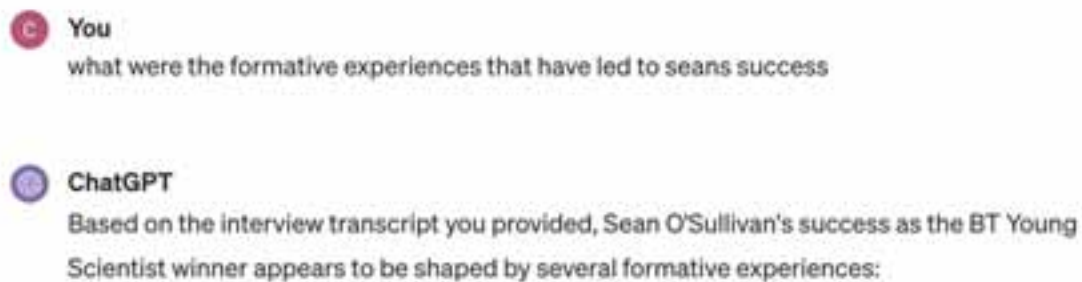
The above content was based on an interview which was recorded and transcribed using ChatGPT.

Upon conclusion, ChatGPT was instructed to summarise two things:

- What were Sean's formative experiences
- What are the takeaways for school leaders

Sean's formative experiences

(Generated by ChatGPT) Prompt:



SEAN'S FORMATIVE EXPERIENCES

(Generated by ChatGPT) Prompt:

1. Early Curiosity and Inquisitiveness: From a young age, Sean demonstrated a strong curiosity which was nurtured through activities such as making Lego sets and creating rope climbers. His interest in how things work and his enjoyment of building and creating set a foundation for his later pursuits in science and technology.
2. Exposure to Technology: Sean's engagement with technology started early. He mentioned getting into 3D

printing at about the age of 12, which not only gave him practical skills but also an understanding of the technological processes.

3. Educational Opportunities: His school provided him with basic programming experiences, which were further enhanced in secondary school with introductions to Python, HTML, and CSS. These skills likely played a crucial role in his ability to take on more complex technological projects.
4. Participation in Competitions: Sean's involvement in various competitions, from the VEX Robotics



competition in primary school to scratch competitions and the BT Young Scientist competition, provided him with platforms to apply his skills, receive feedback and gain recognition.

5. Supportive Environment: Meeting knowledgeable individuals, such as the man from BD who recommended a 3D printer, suggests that Sean had access to a supportive environment that encouraged his interests.
6. Hands-On Projects at Home: Beyond formal education, Sean pursued his interests through personal projects at home, using tools like Arduino and his 3D printer, further honing his technical skills.
7. Research and Development: Sean's iterative approach to his BT Young Scientist project, "VerifyMe," demonstrates his ability to research, develop, and refine a complex idea over time, showing dedication and persistence.



8. Passion for Problem-Solving: Sean described how his projects often came from solving problems as he saw them, using information and ideas he had already absorbed, indicating a strong drive to apply his knowledge to real-world issues.
9. Deadline-Driven Work Ethic: The structure of the BT Young Scientist competition gave him deadlines that forced him to complete his work, suggesting that he learned how to manage his time effectively and deliver under pressure.

These experiences, coupled with Sean's own passion, intelligence, and drive, appear to have been instrumental in his success at the BT Young Scientist and Technology Exhibition and his overall journey in the field of science and technology.



TAKEAWAYS FOR SCHOOL LEADERS

(Generated by ChatGPT) Prompt:

You
can you summarise the key points in Seans interview into an article for a magazine with key takeaway points for school principals

ChatGPT
Certainly! Here's a structured article draft for a magazine targeting school principals, encapsulating the key takeaways from Sean O'Sullivan's interview:

1. **Cultivate Curiosity and Provide Resources:** Encourage an environment where curiosity is nurtured. Provide students with access to resources like building materials (e.g., Lego sets), technology (like 3D printers), and programming tools. Allowing students to explore and create at their own pace can spark a lifelong interest in STEM fields.
2. **Introduce Diverse Programming Skills Early:** Integrate a robust computer science curriculum that introduces students to diverse programming languages and technologies. Exposure to languages like Python, HTML, and CSS from an early age can provide a strong foundation for more advanced studies and innovation in technology.
3. **Support Participation in Competitions and Challenges:** Encourage and facilitate participation in STEM-related competitions and challenges. These events can provide motivation, a platform for showcasing talent, and opportunities for students to apply their knowledge



practically. Success in such competitions can also bolster college applications and career prospects.

4. **Promote Hands-On, Project-Based Learning:** Create opportunities for hands-on, project-based learning where students can work on real-world problems. This approach promotes critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Allowing students to work on projects that interest them can lead to more engaged learning and potentially innovative outcomes.

By adopting these strategies, Principals can help create a school culture that not only supports but also inspires students to pursue excellence in STEM.

This article is designed to provide a narrative that school Principals can draw upon to enhance their strategies for developing STEM capabilities within their schools, inspired by the real-life success of Sean O'Sullivan. This article was authored by ChatGPT.

Seán O'Sullivan is the overall winner of the BT Young Scientist and Technologist for 2024. He is a 17-year-old fifth-year student in Coláiste Chiaráin in Croom, Co Limerick. Among his interests are swimming, 3D printing, reading, playing the piano and coding.



Report on work of Regional Ambassadors – April 2024

Shay Bannon

The Regional Ambassador initiative was launched during the 2022/2023 school year. The rationale for this initiative is that:

- Ambassadors would be a personal link between NAPD and school leaders
- Ambassadors would ascertain and identify school leaders needs thus guiding NAPD on future developments
- Ambassadors would update and keep school leaders informed about recent developments.

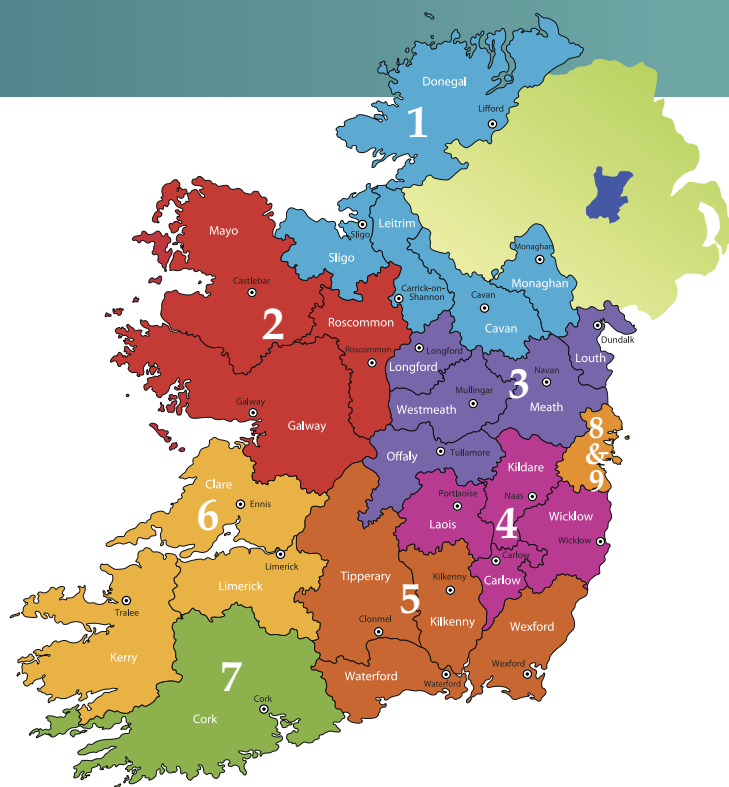
A Regional Ambassador will contact a school in advance to explain the rationale for the visit and to arrange a suitable with the Principal and Deputy Principal. It is recommended that meetings would last for a minimum of 30 minutes. The importance of confidentiality and of the meeting being a “safe space” is also emphasised.

The Ambassadors are:

- Region 1:** Jimmy Keogh, Chris Darby, Ann Waters, Geraldine Driver
- Region 2:** Bernadette Rowland
- Region 3:** Appointments pending
- Region 4:** Appointments pending
- Region 5:** Robert O’Callaghan, Madailin Mhic Loughlin
- Region 6:** Ciaran Cooke
- Region 7:** Mary Keane, Sean Crowley
- Region 8:** Patricia Hayden, Kathy Finnegan
- Region 9:** Tony Collison

90 schools have been visited by Ambassadors to date. Feedback has highlighted many of the safety and welfare challenges (psychological and psychosocial) that are being faced by school leaders on a daily basis. These include:

- Stress and burnout
- Workload demands
- Low job control
- Violence and aggression
- Workplace bullying and harassment
- Conflict/poor workplace relationships/interactions
- Traumatic events
- Inadequate support for work-life balance
- Inadequate feedback from various stakeholders
- Virtual or isolated work
- Lack of role clarity
- Poor communication



- Inadequate reward and recognition
- Poor physical environment

Details of visits are forwarded to the Director, Deputy Director and President so that the National Executive can be advised of the key issues arising at ground level for members.

It has been agreed that:

- Regional Ambassadors would be part of the regional committee
- Members would be made aware of the Regional Ambassador(s) for their region
- Regional Ambassador would receive an invitation to attend regional meetings/Meitheal
- An opportunity would be made available for Regional Ambassador(s) to provide feedback at regional meetings.

Visits have resume after Easter. We look forward to the active engagement and support of colleagues in this very important initiative.

Shay Bannon is Co-Ordinator of the Regional Ambassadors programme.



NEPS – Student Support Teams in Post Primary Schools

The work we do and the difference it makes

Deirdre McHugh & Sarah McGillicuddy

CONTEXT

The Department of Education, as part of its commitment to supporting schools in promoting wellbeing and positive mental health, published the Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2019-2025.



Schools may choose to introduce, develop or review their Student Support Team (SST) structures as part of their wellbeing promotion process in school.

A Student Support Team (SST) is the structure through which a school co-ordinates and plans its student support systems and promotes a whole school approach to wellbeing. Through implementing a Continuum of Support, the SST can provide for the educational, social, emotional, behavioural and learning needs of *all, some and few* students to ensure their ongoing wellbeing.

WHAT IS AN SST?

A SST is the overarching team in the school concerned with providing for the welfare and wellbeing of all students. It is a mechanism through which many of the existing student supports are co-ordinated and planned.



The team problem-solves school issues that may impact on students and accepts referrals regarding the needs of individual and groups of students of concern. The team meets regularly and works together to plan for students' needs and ensures interventions are in place and reviewed as needed.

The SST is usually made up of several core members: a senior management representative (Principal/Deputy), Guidance Counsellor, Special Education Needs co-ordinator and a year head.

In schools where these posts exist, membership can include the SPHE Co-Ordinator, Home School Community Liaison (HSC) teacher, School Completion Officer, Chaplain and Behaviour Support teachers. Additional personnel may also participate dependent on the needs arising.

WHY USE SSTS?

While many factors which influence our wellbeing are located in the home, the school, situated in the community, can be a powerful context for healthy development in enhancing protective factors (i.e. positive relationships in school, a sense of belonging security and connectedness to the school) and minimising risks (e.g. attendance, bullying, low achievement). Improving school systems and supports and strengthening protective factors can have a positive impact on our wellbeing.

While the various teams that focus on students with additional needs are important, if they remain the only structures of support, without a focus on a whole school approach to prevention and early intervention, the following issues may emerge:

- Opportunities for developing protective factors that help increase the learning, health and wellbeing of *all* students in the school could be overlooked
- Students with emerging needs or those who would benefit from minimal support may be overlooked and only considered when matters have deteriorated
- A fire-fighting model of support may exist with an over-reliance on emergency and external services.

THE STUDENT SUPPORT TEAM DEVELOPMENT PROJECT 2018-2019

Method

The SST project 2018/2019 was led by the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS). It emerged as an expansion of the earlier 2014-2017 Dublin project. The project involved 22 post-primary DEIS schools in Cork, Donegal and Dublin.

Schools were clustered and provided with resources; training developed from the previous project, was delivered by psychologists. The project involved 3-4 school visits by the assigned psychologist and 3 CPD sessions with teams in each location.

Data Gathering

The SST rating scale was administered pre- and post-intervention. Following intervention, an open-ended questionnaire was completed with the Principal or link teacher. 15 psychologists also provided feedback using an open-ended questionnaire. The pre- and post- rating scales allowed for quantitative analysis while the questionnaires provided data for thematic analysis.

Findings

The quantitative findings indicated positive change in school structures and supports, with the greatest change and an increased focus in the following areas:

- dealing with systemic issues
- defining roles and responsibilities within the SST
- understanding and implementation of referral procedures
- improving communication systems with parents and outside agencies
- reviewing actions and recording the nature of concerns and engaging with relevant staff training.

A thematic analysis of the qualitative data identified common themes, the differing perspectives within this feedback and the potential directions for future project development. School staff identified the value and importance of structure and procedure and the need to provide support for all students and not just those with identified needs.

These themes were also reflected in the changes in the pre- and post-rating scale results. Other themes that emerged from the school staff questionnaires included the importance of affirmation, networking and space for reflection.

Recommendations

The project supported a Cluster School approach to developing SSTs, involving NEPS psychologists working with clusters of their assigned schools to provide CPD and in-school support.

A Single School approach was also supported where clusters could not be coordinated.

As a result of the project, it was recommended that guidelines were revised, incorporating new resources developed from the project.

These guidelines are available on the NEPS gov.ie platform.



Future plans

SSTs are recognised as an important structure to prevent and address bullying in schools as stated in the recently released Cineáltas action plan¹ on bullying.



'Student support teams play a very valuable role in supporting the welfare and wellbeing of students in post primary schools. Cineáltas contains clear commitments to support all post primary schools to establish student support teams, to develop guidance for the establishment of student support teams in larger primary schools and to ensure that student support teams actively seek the voice and participation of children, young people and their parents'.



Findings from NEPS work in schools in 2022/23 was extremely positive. Evaluations completed by teachers engaged in this work reinforced the findings from the projects and indicated the following:

- Teachers found the cluster work bringing communities of practice together beneficial and found the sharing and learning from other schools important
- Schools valued the time to reflect on current practice and were affirmed by their involvement in the work
- Teachers want follow up visits from psychologists to help implementation in schools
- 100% of the schools involved would recommend the training and support to other schools.

Challenges included time factors, including timetabling, creating the time to meet and having enough time in



meetings to cover what was needed. Teachers also reported on the importance of having leadership support and the significance of management buy-in to implement and embed changes in practice. The importance of school culture was also an emerging theme with teachers noting resistance to change of practice in some schools.

Throughout the 2023/24 academic year NEPS teams continue to support schools using two models of support and training:

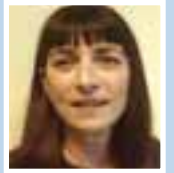
- In-school consultation using a single school approach
- Online support with clusters of schools with sustained visits by an allocated psychologist

NEPS will provide further advice on how schools can further enhance the voice of the student in this work going forward and our learning will now inform work in large primary schools.

For more information, please view the SST guidelines on gov.ie

If you are interested in this work in your school, please speak to your school's NEPS psychologist or contact your local NEPS office for more information on the NEPS training that is available in your local area.

Deirdre McHugh is a Regional Director in NEPS in the Northwest/North Midlands Region responsible for the NEPS service delivery to schools in the area, working with teams in Letterkenny/Sligo/Mullingar offices. She has national responsibility for wellbeing overseeing the work of the Department wellbeing office situated in NEPS. This includes the implementation of the Department Wellbeing policy and NEPS Wellbeing in Schools initiatives.



Sarah McGillicuddy works as an Educational Psychologist in the NEPS Dublin Mid Leinster region. Sarah is a member of the Wellbeing Working Group, as part of the Wellbeing Office in the Department of Education. Her work involves supporting Department wellbeing initiatives including Student Support Team practice and projects in NEPS. Her areas of professional interest include trauma informed practice, attachment, responding to challenging behaviour in the New Authority (an NVR informed approach), social justice and executive functioning.



Killiney Bay

Norman Ashe Collection – 1948-53

*Killiney Bay, with Howth in background
The white building half way up the left-hand side is Holy Child, Killiney.
Before it opened in September 1947 with 34 students, it had been the County Hotel.*

LGBTQ+ Inclusive Schools

Accreditation Programme for LGBTQ+ Safe and Supportive Schools

Sinead Keane

Almost 40 schools across Ireland were recently awarded the LGBTQ+ Quality Mark for their commitment to LGBTQ+ inclusion. These are the first schools to finish the 18-month journey to embed LGBTQ+ inclusion across their school community, policies and practices. The LGBTQ+ Quality Mark is run by Belong To, Ireland's national LGBTQ+ youth organisation.

Students, teachers and Principals from 37 schools came together to receive their award at a celebratory event at The Foundry, Google Headquarters in Dublin. The event was hosted by Presenter and Podcaster, James Kavanagh. Both Minister of State, Jack Chambers and the Secretary General of the Department of Education, Bernie McNally spoke at the event and commended schools on their commitment and success.

LGBTQ+ Quality Mark

The LGBTQ+ Quality Mark initiative is a holistic approach to LGBTQ+ inclusion in post-primary schools that involves the whole school community. The awards represented the culmination of an 18-month journey throughout which schools made a significant commitment to implementing evidence-based actions which are proven to promote LGBTQ+ inclusion in schools.

Unfortunately, school is still a challenging environment for many LGBTQ+ young people. The 2022 School Climate Survey found 76% of LGBTQ+ young people feel unsafe at school¹. LGBTQ+ young people in Ireland are significantly more likely than the general Irish youth population to be deliberately excluded by peers (86% vs 9%); be the focus of rumours/lies (71% vs 8%); be verbally harassed (72% vs 16%); and experience physical harassment (33% vs 6%).

However, there is a growing body of research examining protective factors – interventions that help LGBTQ+ feel more included in school. Three key interventions from the 2022 School Climate Survey included¹:

- A high level of staff support for LGBTQ+ students
- Proactive staff intervention when hearing homophobic remarks
- Positive LGBTQ+ representation in the curriculum

LGBTQ+ students who reported these factors being in place were significantly more likely to feel accepted by the student body, to feel they belong in school and much less likely to miss days of school due to safety concerns. The positive impact of inclusion and visibility allows students to live healthy lives and thrive at school.

The LGBTQ+ Quality Mark is based on the Department of Education's Four Key Areas of Wellbeing:

- Culture & Environment
- Policy & Planning
- Curriculum
- Relationships & Partnerships

Schools are supported to implement a number of requirements and goals within these four areas, and ultimately to promote wellbeing, inclusion and safety for all LGBTQ+ young people in their community.

Schools are supported to implement a number of requirements and goals within these four areas, and ultimately to promote wellbeing, inclusion and safety for all LGBTQ+ young people in their community. Schools are supported every step of the way with all-staff training, specialised training for the LGBTQ+ Mark co-ordinator, membership of a Regional Network of LGBTQ+ Inclusive Schools, one-to-one supports and resources.

Applications for the 2024 intake of LGBTQ+ Quality Mark schools are now open. To learn more about the initiative or sign up, visit www.belongto.org or Email: luke@belongto.org



Embrace The Opportunity

Jill Storey from Villiers School, Co. Limerick and Kathleen O'Brien from Kinsale Community School, Co. Cork, share their experiences participating in Belong To's LGBTQ+ Quality Mark.



As school leaders, we constantly seek ways to enhance the educational experience and wellbeing of our students. This is why I am thrilled to share the journey and significance of our school being awarded the Belong To LGBTQ+ Quality Mark, meaning that our school has been recognised as a safe space for LGBTQ+ students.

In achieving the award, our school community is conscious that we do not want it to be a badge of honour, but a living and daily commitment to continue in our work to foster an inclusive and supportive environment where every student feels valued and respected, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Receiving the award is testament to the hard work and dedication of the entire school community, students, staff, parents and guardians, past pupils, in championing diversity, equity, and inclusion, whilst availing of the practical guidance, support and encouragement offered by Belong To.

Beyond our school gates, the scope for the significance of this recognition extends far and wide. It serves as a beacon for the values we hold and espouse, and the world which

we wish to inhabit. It allows prospective students approach our school with a clear understanding of Villiers ethos and sends a message to those who may have a different agenda.

For schools considering pursuing this Quality Mark, I urge you to embrace the opportunity. By prioritising the safety and well-being of LGBTQ+ students, we not only create a more accepting environment but also foster a sense of belonging and empowerment among all students.

Moreover, achieving this Quality Mark can be a transformative experience for your school community. The practical nature of the award means that schools can avail of simple advice on how best to support students, and allies, and encourages action on policy, representation, curriculum, facilities and school culture and climate.

Our school feels strong, supported and more impactful as a result of this initiative. While there is always more to do, this award affirms our commitment to facilitating an equitable and inclusive educational landscape for all.

Jill Storey,
Head of School, Villiers School, Limerick

Kinsale Community School

Kathleen O'Brien, Deputy Principal, Kinsale Community School, Co. Cork



At Kinsale Community School, the pursuit of inclusivity and diversity is deeply embedded in our ethos, as we aim to provide a nurturing educational environment that values every student. We are delighted that the journey towards achieving the LGBTQ+ Quality Mark became part of this picture over the last 18 months.

Our approach in Kinsale integrates a robust pastoral care structure with a culture of empathy and respect to ensure every learner is valued and supported. Through our engagement with the LGBTQ+ Quality Mark process, we have undertaken significant steps to foster an inclusive atmosphere, particularly for our LGBTQ+ community,

Our approach in Kinsale integrates a robust pastoral care structure with a culture of empathy and respect to ensure every learner is valued and supported.

by implementing inclusive school policies, promoting a zero-tolerance stance on LGBTQ+ phobic bullying, and enhancing our curriculum to include LGBTQ+ topics.

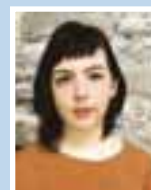
Through visual representation and active participation in awareness campaigns, we've worked to create a welcoming space that celebrates diversity. Our efforts extend to providing safe spaces for students and ensuring our staff have undergone training to support LGBTQ+ young people effectively. The establishment of an LGBTQ+ Quality Mark Co-ordination Team including students and a student led LGBTQ+ club underlines our commitment to making all students feel accepted, safe, supported, and ready to learn.

Our proactive measures in addressing LGBTQ+ bullying and fostering an environment where diversity is celebrated have been instrumental in enhancing our school as a community where every student feels accepted and valued for who they are.

I am really grateful to students in the school who have been courageous enough to embrace the Quality Mark process, the lead members of our committee Roy Sheehan and Fiona Hedderman, and Stephen Cassidy from Belong To, who has been hugely supportive on our journey".



¹ Pizmony-Levy, O. (2022) The 2022 Irish School Climate Survey. Research Report. Global Observatory of LGBTQ+ Education and Advocacy. Dublin and New York: Belong To and Teachers College, Columbia University. This is available at <https://www.belongto.org/support-our-work/advocacy/lgbtq-research/belong-to-school-climate-survey-2022/>



Sinead Keane is Director of Communications and Advocacy with Belong To.

The Changing Face of Catholic Voluntary Secondary Schools

Experiences of First Lay Principals

Dominic McQuillan

The title of my doctoral thesis is 'The Changing Face of the Catholic Voluntary Secondary School in Ireland: The Experiences of a Cohort of First Lay Principals' (2011).

The purpose of the study was to describe the experiences of a cohort of lay Principals, who were the first to hold this position in Catholic voluntary secondary schools in Ireland.

The study documents the experiences of some of those first lay Principals who took over from the priests, nuns and brothers, who were the previous Principals of Catholic voluntary secondary schools.

The process of lay appointment began, in the main, in the mid-1980s. The period before and since then had been a time of great change in the Catholic Church, in Irish society in general and in Irish education in particular. The transition to lay Principalship coincided with these changes in the Catholic Church, in Irish society and in Irish education and it impacted on, and was impacted by, them.

The appointment of lay Principals marked a fundamental change in the management and leadership structure of Catholic voluntary secondary schools. For approximately two hundred years, Catholics in Ireland experienced and accepted priests, brothers and nuns as the major providers of mainstream education at second level in Ireland. Lay teachers had previously been confined to a subsidiary role, as class teachers, even though they may have comprised the majority of those working in the school.

This was the norm. The appointment of lay Principals put lay men and women, for the first time, in the key leadership, management and responsibility role, previously held exclusively by a diocesan priest or member of a religious order.

The appointment of lay Principals followed, in most cases, the introduction of Boards of Management, which widened the management structure to include nominees of parents and teachers alongside nominees of the founding trustees. For the first time, in these schools, ownership and management were no longer identical.

This led to an immediate change in key relationships in the school. The traditional relationship between trustees, on the one hand, and parents and students on the other, now operated at a step removed. The familial relationship between Principal and founding trustees no longer existed. For lay teachers, the opening of the path to the position of Principal meant that the traditional barrier between lay staff and a clerical Principal was open to change and evolution.

Because the Principal of a school fulfils a key management and administrative role in the organisation, the research was contextualised within the framework of theories of educational administration. In addition, there is an examination of literature on family business. Parallels were drawn between the development and structure of family business moving to outside management and the process in Catholic voluntary secondary schools as they moved towards lay management and leadership.

The research includes an examination of the nature of the Catholic school, with particular emphasis on the Catholic Church documents since the Second Vatican Council and other modern writings on Catholic education. Did the move to lay Principals derive from the spirit of the documents of the Second Vatican Council, or did it result from the rapid decline in vocations experiences in this period?

The role of the lay teacher is traced through the history of Catholic secondary schooling in Ireland, from the earliest Catholic school established in 1782 to the time of the



In all cases, the interviewees were the first lay person, following a succession of priests, nuns or brothers in the post of Principal. It was important to document what these first Principals had to say, while they were still Principal or recently retired.

appointment of lay Principals in the 1980s. The role of the ASTI teaching union was significant throughout this period, but did the union ever envisage that the members would in time be candidates for Principalship?

There is literature which can enlighten and inform our understanding of organisations, including schools and family businesses as social systems. There is considerable literature on the background to the appointment of lay Principals in Catholic voluntary secondary schools. But there is a lack of documentation of the experiences of those most closely involved, namely, the first lay Principals.

This doctoral research addresses that imbalance.

In all cases, the interviewees were the first lay person, following a succession of priests, nuns or brothers in the post of Principal. It was important to document what these first Principals had to say, while they were still Principal or recently retired. Their experiences as Principals were different from those of the religious who went before them. It was also different from the experiences of those Principals who came after them.

Both male and female Principals were interviewed. They were Principals in single sex and co-education schools in Dublin and elsewhere in Ireland. At the time of interview, some were still active in their position, others were retired.

The research was designed as an inductive, qualitative study. A grounded theory strategy was used whereby a general abstract theory of a process, action or interaction is derived, grounded in the views of the participants in the study, rather than beginning with a conceptual framework. The concepts emerged in the course of the study.

Broad general areas of investigation became more focused as the study progressed. As a result, relevant literature was incorporated into later sections of the study. This was in line with the research design using a grounded theory qualitative strategy, where literature is used inductively to compare and contrast with themes which emerge in the research.

In such a study, questions emerge during the course of the interview process and the consequent analysis. The investigation began with broad general areas of experience.

Interviewees were asked five central questions:

- How would first lay Principals describe their path to school Principalship and the influences which brought them there?

- How do first lay Principals describe the role of being a Principal, from the time of their appointment
- How do first lay Principals describe the level of support which characterised their early years in the position?
- How do first lay Principals view the relationship which they had with the teachers, the teaching union and others in the school community?
- How do first lay Principals view their relationship with the school trustees?

The investigation became more focused as the assembly of data progressed. Many differing themes were examined when the interviews were analysed. Together they build a picture of the Catholic voluntary secondary school as it was before the appointment of lay Principals and how the position of Principal was experienced by those first lay Principals.

Their experiences were summarised under six broad headings:

- Principals' experiences in relation to the trustees of the school
- Principals' experiences of school internal management structures
- Principals' experiences of the work commitment in their new position
- Principals' experiences of membership of the ASTI
- Principals' experiences of the changes under the Programme for Competitiveness and Work (PCW) agreement restructuring school management
- Principals' experiences in curriculum management - as leaders of teaching and learning.

The conclusions of this study were drawn from the research analysis of the data provided in the interviews with Principals. They encapsulate the experiences of the lay Principals.

Four major conclusions are presented.

1. The differing attitudes to the exercise of responsibility which existed in Catholic voluntary secondary schools were critical elements in the experience of first lay Principals.

Catholic voluntary secondary schools were set up by the Catholic bishops and by congregations of priests, nuns and brothers. Power and responsibility in education was exclusively in the hands of religious. Lay men and women teachers were excluded from power and responsibility.

When the first steps were taken to bring lay teachers into positions of responsibility in the late 1960s and early 1970s, structures which emerged can be categorised as a continued withholding of power and responsibility on the

management side and a trade union supported position of avoidance of responsibility by post holders. At the time of the appointment of first lay Principals, there was a culture of ambiguity on where responsibility rested and how it should be exercised.

Most business outside the classroom was the concern of management, and by management was meant the religious Principal. This ambiguity impacted strongly on newly appointed lay Principals.

2. First lay Principals were appointed to schools, which for historical reasons were structured and focused on an individual religious Principal. This historical management structure contributed to the sense of isolation which first lay Principals experienced.

The culture of Catholic schools projected the religious Principal as the individual central focus of all facets of the school in relation to teachers, other employees, parents, pupils and the community. It was a model of governance inherited within a hierarchical and bureaucratic church, with no framework for collaborative leadership and collaborative responsibility.

But the new lay Principal was not a member of the ownership body and did not inherit the traditional congregational structures that had traditionally supported the religious Principal. The supporting changes in internal management which eventually came with the PCW were unknown and still some distance in the future.

In between was a considerable period of years when the historical, individual model of Principalship left lay Principals with wide responsibilities but inadequate supporting structures, and consequently, with a considerable sense of isolation.

This sense of isolation was one of the key characteristics of the position of Principal, as experienced by the first cohort of lay Principals.

3. Trustees of Catholic voluntary secondary schools appointed first lay Principals as leaders of Catholic schools, based on a picture of candidates built up outside the formal interview process. Their trust was rewarded in the strong commitment to trustee ethos, which characterised the first generation of lay Principals.

Today, candidates for a position of Principal in a Catholic secondary school can be quite clear on the Catholic identity of the school, the mission statement and the policies in the school which derive from that mission and which guide action and procedures. No such elaborate framework existed at the time of appointment of many first lay Principals.

More recent changes in trustee structures towards trust bodies necessitated clear documentation of Catholic identification. The process of developing explicit mission



It seems certain that the assumptions that trustees were able to make about the first lay Principals may not be possible for those who follow behind them, who have grown up in a much more questioning, pluralist, secular 'post-Catholic Ireland'.

statements and policies was in its infancy and the process formed a considerable part of the early years for first lay Principals working with trustees, Boards of Management, teachers, parents and pupils. This generation of first Principals could be considered as an 'interim generation' following generations of homogeneous Irish Catholic society where the role of the Catholic Church was an accepted reality in education and other aspects of daily life.

It seems certain that the assumptions that trustees were able to make about the first lay Principals may not be possible for those who follow behind them, who have grown up in a much more questioning, pluralist, secular 'post-Catholic Ireland'.

4. An increasing focus on school Principals as Catholic leaders of Catholic schools has laid additional management and leadership responsibility on lay Principals.

There are many aspects of management, leadership and responsibility inherent in the position of Principal in a Catholic voluntary school. Those interviewed in this study found themselves in the midst of two changing dynamics. On the one hand, the previously implicit nature of the Catholic voluntary secondary school is becoming more explicit. On the other hand, Irish society's ready acceptance of a Catholic social view on life, including education, is diminishing rapidly.

Not only are these two changing dynamics at work, but they are opposing. The lay Principal could be caught between them.

Dominic McQuillan was appointed Principal of St Paul's College Raheny, Dublin in 1990. He was the first lay Principal, following a succession of priests of the Vincentian Community. He retired in 2004. He completed a Ph.D. (DCU) in 2011 after retirement.



Dominic would be pleased to hear from current or retired Principals or Deputy Principals who are interested in his research. He is happy to give access to his work to those who wish to read further.

He can be contacted at djmccq95@gmail.com

Have you conducted academic research that might be of interest to colleagues?

Our contact details are on the editorial page.



Mayo College of Further Education and Training

A Journey Towards an Integrated FET College of the Future

Michael Murphy

Mayo College of Further Education and Training (MCFET) was established by Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim ETB in March 2021 and began operations one month later. The College was formed as the result of a merger of Castlebar College of Further Education (Castlebar CFE) and Westport College of Further Education (Westport CFE), both long-standing Colleges of Further Education within Mayo.

This College, one of Ireland newest FET Colleges has gone from strength to strength since its formation. In 2022 Mayo College took responsibility for all VTOS provision in 6 centres throughout Mayo. It also began running PLC courses in Ballina in what was formally Moyne College.

All other schools in Mayo have ceased offering PLC courses, thus leaving Mayo College as the sole provider of PLC courses in entire county.

The number of full-time courses has increased from 45 in April 2021 to 67 in September 2023. Enrolment figures are another metric of success, with 629 fulltime PLC students – a 62% increase since the College's formation, 130 fulltime VTOS learners – a 25% increase and 450 part-time learners – a 18% increase.

The College was given the green light in November 2022 to proceed to the next stage in developing a multi-million-euro College of the Future (COTF) in Castlebar under the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science/SOLAS. This development will see a new state-of-the-art campus developed with a significant upgrade and expansion of MCFET in Castlebar.

At the announcement Minister Simon Harris stated *"The College will build and maintain links with ATU to ensure clear pathways for students between FET and HE. It will also build on developing the new digital skills centre in Ballina, which is providing personalised learning programmes for people in the county".*

The latest addition to Mayo College is the establishment of a new Apprenticeship Centre in Claremorris, with plans to deliver 4 Business/IT apprenticeships. These include Accounting and three Apprenticeships of which Mayo College has been part of the development team including Immersive Technologies, Digital Marketing and Sales.

The College's Erasmus+ programme which started with 7 students placed in a partner College in Nimes, France in 2015 has rapidly expanded. Mayo College is an accredited Erasmus+ College and will send over 120 students and 40 staff on Erasmus+ mobilities in 2024.

Erasmus+ has been fully integrated the Erasmus+ project into all facets of College life for both staff and student mobilities. A snapshot of the integration includes:

- Partners in Malta, Cyprus, Norway, Finland, Iceland, Denmark, France, Spain, Portugal, Poland, Estonia, Germany and Romania
- Learners on all 60 courses have the opportunity to partake in a vocational workplace in their vocational

“ *Elevating its commitment to sustainability, the College has forged a partnership with Mayo GAA, to promote and enhance environmental responsibility. This collaboration extends beyond the realm of education into a major sustainability and biodiversity project at Hasting Insurance MacHale Park, the county ground of Mayo GAA.*

area, which shows the wide range of placements available to the student population.

- All Erasmus+ placements give students credit towards their QQI final assessment and this formally recognising international Erasmus+ placements in student exam results.

This year will see the College embrace its first international Erasmus project, with two students of Agriculture embarking on a three-month placement on a 5,500-cow dairy farm in New Zealand, giving them a once in a lifetime opportunity to see the operations of an agricultural enterprise on such a scale.

Elevating its commitment to sustainability, the College has forged a partnership with Mayo GAA, to promote and enhance environmental responsibility. This collaboration extends beyond the realm of education into a major sustainability and biodiversity project at Hasting Insurance MacHale Park, the county ground of Mayo GAA.

Both staff and students actively participated in tree planting, hedge repair, and the creation of wild bird cover as part of a Biodiversity plan. They also supported Connaught GAA in their Centre of Excellence, planting over 1,000 trees in 3 days.

This all contributes to a healthier planet and to instilling a sense of environmental stewardship among our students. This, coupled with all students undertaking a certified micro-credential in 'Energy use and You' ensured learners were aware of how to aid environmental sustainability.

Mayo College is immensely proud that the College has rapidly become a beacon of educational excellence and community engagement. Its multifaceted approach, from academic expansion to environmental sustainability, reflects a holistic commitment to nurturing well-rounded individuals equipped for success in the dynamic landscape of the future.

The College was recently shortlisted in the Education Awards for the Further Education Provider of the Year and Erasmus Provider of the Year.

The model adopted by MSLETB in Mayo College of Further Education and Training offers significant advantages to the learners in Mayo and provides food for thought for other FET providers commencing their journey towards a FET College of the Future.



Michael Murphy began his teaching career at Senior College Dún Laoghaire (now Blackrock Further Education Institute) in 2001, teaching Business and Computer Programming. He was appointed Principal at Westport College of Further Education in 2011 and in Mayo College of Further Education and Training in 2021.



Blackrock

Blackrock College, founded in 1860, occupies the centre space. Dominican College Sion Hill, founded in 1836 occupies the land at bottom right hand corner. By 1950 there were 120 day pupils and 130 borders. St Catherine's College of Education for Home Economics, founded in 1929, also occupied this site, before being closed and moved to Sligo in 2007.

Norman Ashe Collection – 1948-53



Leading Learning and Teaching in St Colman's Community College Midleton, Co Cork

A co-educational, multi-denominational post-primary school under the patronage of Cork ETB

Yvonne O'Mahony

At any gathering of school leaders, one will inevitably find a common thread of conversation; that while Learning and Teaching is our core business, if we were to pie-chart our time, most would admit that leading Learning and Teaching often gets the thinnest slice of the pie.

This can be a frustration felt by many school leaders. We are all teachers, committed to ensuring quality learner experiences and outcomes, but with all of the other demands on our time, how do we lead Learning and Teaching without actually being in the classroom?

In 2017, our school had an entirely newly appointed leadership team and with a third newly appointed DP joining the team in 2018, we had to ask ourselves that very question. But before we figured out where we wanted to go, we had to reflect on where we were at that time.

We have had a long-standing commitment to consistently providing high quality Learning and Teaching. In the noughties a team of teachers attended Instructional Leadership programmes by Barrie Bennett. In recent years, teachers from eleven different subject departments completed the Magenta Principles training. Magenta reminds us that our job is to get students thinking, talking, doing and, ultimately, learning.

While there were many excellent and exciting practices happening in individual classrooms, sharing experiences wasn't part of our culture. So, the question was - how we would go about developing that culture?

TEACH-MEETS

Teach-Meets was one of our first initiatives. It made sense to make the most of the wealth of knowledge, ideas and enthusiasm within our school. We usually hold one or two

per term for 30 minutes on a Wednesday afternoon (of course, there's always chocolate and scones as an added incentive).

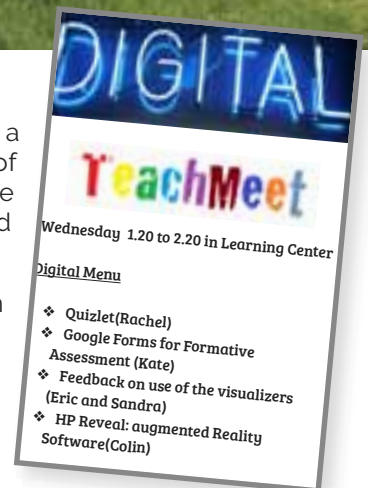
The use of technology as an effective learning tool is where our journey into internal CPD and shared Learning and Teaching experiences began. The first time we used Teach-Meets as a vehicle to introduce a new initiative was the introduction of visualizers. Visualizers enable better live modelling and presentation, allowing teachers to face the class and not the board while doing so, they can capture lesson material or student work which can be shared to Google drive etc.

A core group of teachers piloted this initiative. They attended a Teach-Meet led by peers to see how the visualizer could be used to enhance Learning and Teaching. To get a visualizer, you had to attend the Teach-Meet and be willing to share your experience with others afterwards - and so it grew.

Over the last five years, the Teach-Meets have been the vehicle by which a number of Learning and Teaching initiatives have been introduced, shared and embedded. Teachers have also facilitated Teach-Meets in the areas of formative assessment, the use of AI and augmented reality in the classroom.

ACTIVE LEARNING BOXES

In 2019, we began an initiative around having an Active Learning Box in every classrooms.





The box would contain items such as:

- Class set of mini whiteboards, markers and erasers
- Pack of note cards
- Various coloured post-its
- Magic Clearboard or Magic blackboard and chalk
- Set of placemats for group work (A3 and laminated for re-use)
- Set of Venn Diagrams for group work (A3 and laminated for re-use)
- Copy of 'Active Learning: An integrated approach to Teaching and Learning' (PDST)
- Copy of 'Graphic Organizers in Teaching and Learning' (PDST)
- Coloured Pencils
- Various coloured highlighters
- Stickers (eg dots for dotmocracy etc)

We started with ten boxes and mailed teachers to find who would like to trial the boxes in their classrooms. Some of the recipients people later facilitated Teach-Meets around how they had used the various items to enhance learning in the classroom. Then ten more boxes were distributed and so on. Now there is a box in most classrooms in the school



and teachers have been adding to them items such as traffic light cards, decks of cards(maths) and so on.

DIGITAL LEARNING

Electronic Device Trolleys

In 2019-2020 an iPad trolley containing a class set of iPads was purchased. A Chromebook trolley was also purchased. The devices offer students the ability to conduct research, type projects and present findings; they are particularly suited to the new Junior Cycle programme allowing students to investigate, prepare and present learning for classroom-based assessments.

Teachers can centrally present on screens and increase student engagement, interactivity and voice. Learning and Teaching apps which require students to be actively engaged in the learning have proved very popular. There is an application for the iPads in every subject and teachers and students are exploring all the possibilities.

Fast forward to 2023 and the expansion of the device trolleys to 7 across the school has allowed us the scope to transform any classroom into a digital hub and has brought many benefits to students' learning experiences. The provision of these devices in the Learning Hub and Learning Centre for AEN classes ensures that all students have equality of opportunity and access to the best possible resources to support their learning.

St Colman's is very proud to have been recognised with the prestigious European Digital School status for outstanding contributions in digital Learning and Teaching.



SURFACE PRO INITIATIVE

Over time, the Surface Pro initiative has taken the Visualizer project into its next phase. The Surface Pro has all of the Visualizer's capabilities but allows the teacher to move around the room and interact with students. It is currently in phase two and has been embedded across three subject departments. In a survey, 83% of students agreed that Learning and Teaching improved as a direct results of the use of this device.

SELFIE

Our school undertook a process called SELFIE in the 2022-2023 academic year to assist in determining how we were currently using digital technologies and where we might next improve our digital strategies. SELFIE, developed by the European Commission, is being used by schools across Europe to get a snapshot of their Digital situation.

The results from Selfie were rich in detail and informed not



only our current digital learning position, but provided a roadmap for a number of future digital action plans in the school. Selfie highlighted that our students did not feel as confident in digital competencies as they should in order to maximise their learning through utilising the extensive digital infrastructure that the school provides.

Our Digital Learning Team determined that the most appropriate way to engage with student digital competencies was to set up a Digital Student Team and then facilitate them to establish the digital areas where students were encountering difficulties. The student digital team would then provide required supports.

The Digital Learning Team and the Student Digital Team devised a Google form survey to identify the digital literacy levels of first years. The Student Team is now involved in the digital upskilling of 1st years.

TEACHER-BASED CLASSROOMS

Prior to Covid, there was a long-standing culture of teacher-based classrooms in our school. With Covid we changed to student-based classrooms. Post Covid we debated returning to teacher-based classrooms. While there are some advantages to student-based classrooms, the benefits for Learning and Teaching of teacher-based classrooms are undeniable.

Among these are:

- Teachers are present to greet arriving students
- Maximises class contact time
- Subject specific learning environment
- Allows the display of student work from different year groups in subject specific areas
- Easier to locate the specific equipment/material for lessons

It provided the opportunity for students to change learning environment, moving from one classroom to another, thus improving students' attention, concentration and organisational and building in movement/regulation breaks for all students.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The leadership capacity in our school has grown exponentially over the last number of years. Leading learning beyond the classroom is the norm for our teachers now. Other initiatives that have been/are being implemented include a 'Seeing is Believing' Project, which entails professional conversations around Learning and Teaching, as well as teachers visiting each other's classrooms; the development of a learning-how-to-learn module for all Junior Cycle students; and ensuring that Learning and Teaching is at the forefront of the agenda at every staff meeting.

Back to the big question – can you lead Learning and Teaching in a school without being in the classroom? The answer, yes – by building working groups that provide opportunities for leadership and enhanced capacity, by harnessing the knowledge and talents of the people in your community, by being open to new ideas, by thinking outside the box and by being willing to try and fail and try again.

Looking to the future, we will continue to distribute leadership, we will embed the strategies that are working and rethink the ones that are not. We will of course monitor and evaluate (through LAOS, DEIS/SSE, SIP) the impact of these learner experiences on learner outcomes.

Most importantly, we will grow our community of shared practice and learn lots of new and exciting things along the way. As educators we must be perpetual learners.

At the age of 87, one year before he died, Michelangelo said "I am still learning". For as long as we're around, that's our plan too.

Yvonne O'Mahony has been a teacher of English and History in St Colman's since 2001. She was appointed Deputy Principal in 2018.





Principals' thoughts on the new Sustainability Toolkit

Patrick Kirwan

Recently I was invited, as an Irish Schools Sustainability Network (ISSN) representative, to chair a panel discussion at an Educate Together Conference on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). It was a humbling, inspiring experience to witness the innovation, creativity and dedication of the teachers who presented at the teach meet.

The case studies presented were straightforward and effective. They ranged from fostering meaningful conversations with students in the classroom to engaging students with nature. In one case study, Mark O' Brien from Carlow Educate Together invited his students to investigate their locality and identify problem areas and possible solutions. He encouraged them to use their voices to communicate their findings to local government representatives. These projects are examples of intentional practice and required effort, time, thinking, energy, and in some cases a few additional resources.

This isn't common practice in schools. Why haven't we moved the dial on ESD?

Schools can now opt to make ESD a focus for their school self-evaluation (SSE) and in September 2023 the Department of Education published a sustainability toolkit.



SCAN ME

The toolkit supports schools in implementing ESD as part of the school sector climate action mandate and ESD strategy to 2030. It comprises a self-assessment sustainability audit, sustainability guidelines and a template sustainability policy statement.

I conducted a very unscientific poll to see how this landed with Principals. 14 Principals responded. 12 were aware that they could choose ESD as a focus for their SSE, but only 1 had chosen ESD as a focus.

The barriers cited include:

- Lack of expertise, knowledge and training
- Hard to get buy-in from staff
- Lack of teacher time
- Difficulty knowing where to start
- A perception that many of the initiatives require excessive funding
- A perception that there is not a lot of support out there for schools and it would require a lot of extra work for a school
- Competing demands for improvement in other areas

The support they called for included: a dedicated sustainability post, whole staff training and training for post holders, guidance steps to follow with achievable, measurable targets; advisory visits and time to plan.



I feel we work in isolation across the school on lots of different projects that fall partially or wholly into the Education for Sustainable Development. The challenge is in pulling these together and focusing on all the initiatives completed and making a real impact on the learner experience. A sustainability policy would help here. It is a very broad area also- where to start ... **School Principal**



"I think we can always do with more support, since it's another (albeit very worthwhile) initiative that comes on top of everything else we need to do"

School Principal

50% of the Principals had heard of the sustainability toolkit and two have developed a sustainability policy for their school. 13 out of 14 Principals made explicit requests for more support. Advisory visits were suggested with regional coordinators that could link in with schools.

When you find the time to sit down and look at the toolkit, at first glance, it can be quite intimidating. However, as one Principal stated the "priority is to focus on one element and not get overwhelmed". The toolkit helps schools to map out what they are currently doing and develop a strategy on how to proceed.

Schools are not expected to become bastions of sustainability overnight. It takes time. In my school, Árdcoil na Mara, we have done some substantial work, which we are proud of, but we have a long way to go to meaningfully impact knowledge, attitudes, and practices.

The good news is there is quite a considerable amount of support out there for schools including:

- Future Focus 21C
- Global Action Plan Ireland
- ISSN



As a Principal, I sometimes lack the confidence or expertise in this area to lead and guide other members of the school community on existing and emerging sustainability issues.

There are so many simple things we can do in schools to support, encourage and enable our students and our school communities to develop agendas for change and devise a list of actions that better serve our planet and its future.

I think it would be better if NAPD, as the leading organisation for second level school leaders in this country, took the lead here and enabled the ISSN, interested school leaders and those schools already engaged in the sustainability arena, to share knowledge and expertise, and, most importantly, provide support to all schools through its regional structures and meetings

Eric Gaughran, Principal, Coláiste Lorcáin, Castledermot, Co Kildare



- Rewrite Climate
- Susan Adams Education for Sustainability
- Take 1 Programme
- WorldWide Global Schools

There are others. While the Department of Education (DoE) also provides some ESD funding (up to 5K annually), which schools can apply for in September, we know that a lot more is needed.

What we need now is training for leadership in ESD that will build confidence and encourage more senior leadership teams to get excited about ESD and all of the opportunities it will provide.

Oide, as a new organisation tasked with "supporting the professional learning of school leaders and teachers in Ireland" has an exciting opportunity to lead the way in the most important challenge faced by the education system to date.

NAPD, another organisation that "empowers and supports school leaders" has a crucial role to play and could provide support to all schools through its regional structures and meetings, as suggested by Principal Eric Gaughran, Coláiste Lorcáin. Patron bodies and trustees too have an important role to play in inspiring action and supporting schools.

The challenge can only be faced by working together with a collaborative and creative mindset, using innovative and responsive thinking and practice which ultimately should bring about a different kind of professional learning experience for school leaders.

Let us move the dial on ESD by supporting leaders in schools and showing that ESD is a priority for all stakeholders.

Patrick Kirwan teaches in Ardscoil na Mara, Waterford.

He founded The Irish Schools Sustainability Network (ISSN) to provide a forum for teachers and students to work in partnership to accelerate climate and ecological action.

You can follow Patrick on twitter @growgardeners or catch up with the ISSN @IrishSchSusty or visit their website www.issn.ie.





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