

# Study visit Dublin, Ireland, November 15 - 17, 2011

## Visit details

### 1st day morning

#### Welcome and Introductions

Participants during the morning session:

- Don Mahon (Assistant Chief Inspector, DES, and RB Ireland)
- Seamus Hempenstall (Principal Officer, Further Education Section, DES)
- Finn O'Murchú (Senior Inspector, DES)
- Mr. Jordan (?)
- Mary Lyon (Fás)
- Rory O'Sullivan (Principal, Killester College of Further Education)
- Inge Placklé (Expert from Belgium)
- Edgar Pereira (Expert from Portugal)
- Harald Weber (European Agency)

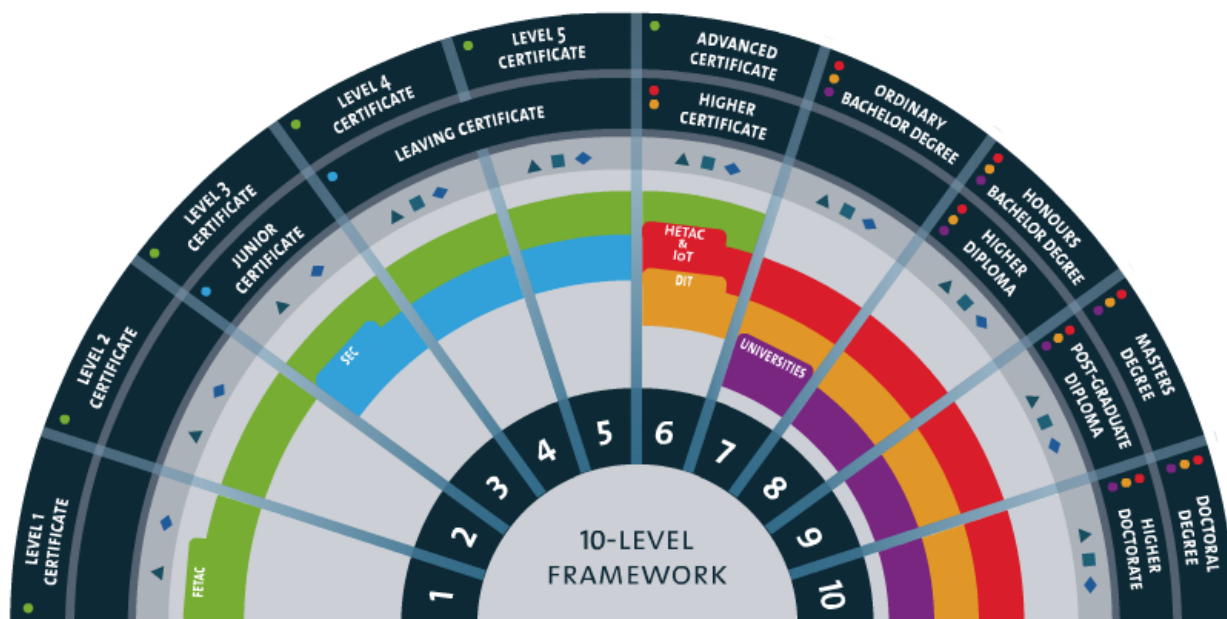
**Don** welcomed all participants to the Department of Education and Skills ([www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie) Department of Education and Skills) and introduced into the topic.

**Harald** gave an overview of the VET project (see PDF presentation **0-VET-project-overview.pdf**).

**Seamus** gave an overview of Further Education and Training in Ireland. He emphasised that the Irish system is of an organic nature, grown over a long period. E.g. in the late 80s ESF funds were used for school leavers, in early 2000 new programmes have been started, and at the end a huge range of different programmes co-existed, however missing a central coordination. This gap is planned to be filled by next year through the creation of a new Agency as a coordination force to direct all VET activities towards a common goal, and to implement a National skill strategy.

Currently, money is allocated to 33 Vocational Education Committees (VEC) throughout the country to provide programmes, on which they report back to the Ministry. Of about 180,000 people in further education, about 130,000 are enrolled in part time further education (mainly levels 1 to 4, of which only some lead to certificates) and about 50,000 enrolled in full time further education (i.e. more than 17 hrs per week, mostly for adults like unemployed or early school leavers, covering levels 3 to 6 with certificates; the cohorts involved in full-time further education are very diverse).

The National Framework for Qualification (NFQ) ([www.nfq.ie](http://www.nfq.ie) National Framework of Qualifications) has 10 levels (see graphic below).



Before, during and after courses, participants have access to guidance counsellors and free child care. But also combinations of full time and part time (e.g. to deal with literacy issues) are possible.

It seems that there is no special funding for Learners with disabilities, except for higher levels for e.g. assistive technology. The VECs mentioned before offer own programmes, pay organisations to deliver programmes or pay tutors to deliver programmes. For learners with severe disabilities, VECs might also deal with them yet using different funds. The VEC is always the local coordinator, managing the resources, and is the employer of staff funded by DES (?). See for example [www.cdvec.ie](http://www.cdvec.ie) City of Dublin VEC.

The most recent developments will lead to a merger of VECs and other organisations to a total of 16 local education and training boards to be established until 2013. Also the various certification bodies need to amalgamate.

**Mary** Lyon continued with her presentation. She clarified that the emphasis in levels 1 to 3 is on personal development with some parts related to basic skills, while for levels 4 and 5 the emphasis is on skill development with parts related to personal development. She highlighted that for the first time a centralised plan is close to become reality in VET.

The organisation Mary works for, Fás, contracts with specialist training provisions to provide vocational training programmes which target the needs of people with disabilities. Additional support given to that group might involve longer study durations, adapted equipment, transport arrangements, enhanced programme content or improved trainer / learner ratio.

The type of learning provided through Fás covers the NFQ certification levels 3 to 5. Individualised training plans are scheduled to be implemented by 2012, study durations range from 12 to 24 months but can be extended if needed. In the attempt to reduced the huge variety of courses and to ensure a certain standard, 350 different elective modules are available for which Fás developed 'envelopes' for the different levels and for specific awards. By doing this, still a range of flexibility is left for the training service provider. The range of vocational training offered is related to the local or regional labour market and therefore is different at different geographic locations.

Of 2,110 places in specialist training provision for which funding is available, in 2010 a number of 1,334 completed the training of which 25% progressed to further training / education.

Changes are also going on in this area with regard to a new procurement approach planned. There is an agreement to move towards the creation of an open competition, to ensure best value for money, and to ensure delivery of most relevant and effective services. This approach is focusing on tendering, service delivery and funding. The system is in a transitional phase, with 2011 to prepare for the new service model, and 2012 with enhanced service specifications and procurement pilots in two regions. In the future, each centre needs to show how it addresses local needs and how it links to the local labour market.

The service delivery objectives are to ensure that all training is relevant (NFQ certification, relevance to the labour market, improvement of progression opportunities, innovative, flexible, and quality assured) and that the training is learner-centred (identification and response to learner's support needs, development of individual learning plans and individual progression plans, and focus on outcomes).

Introduction to the study visit by **Rory**. The certification system is undergoing a major change at the moment. FETAC is the National certification system, but before there were different certification bodies ([www.fetac.ie](http://www.fetac.ie) FETAC - Further Education and Training Awards Council). During the last 2 years, a merger took place to one certification institution, requiring both migration (i.e. for certificates that existed once and which just migrated into the new system) and harmonisation (i.e. several certificates existed in parallel, requiring agreements). The common award system just started with level 3, level 4 and upwards will follow soon. (Level 4 but especially 5 upwards are considered first levels to enter into employment or higher education). In the future there will be minor awards (on single subjects) and major awards (resulting in a full certificate, requiring a minimum of 8 minor awards in core subjects and elected subjects; core subjects are considered important for employability and are mandatory, e.g. communication and work experience placement of a minimum of 10 days / year plus preparation and placement). Knowledge and skills can be provided by schools, but competence can only be achieved through practice.

The system of FETAC is enormously flexible with regard to adapting the assessment to the needs of the students. Teachers can propose adaptations which are then checked and agreed upon.

There is also a change with regard to the focus of lessons. Instead of working along a set of fixed contents, now the task is formulated as "*At the end of the lessons students / learners should be able to ...*", which provides much more flexibility to the teacher (see for example PDF documents **7-Level-5-Communications-current-version.pdf** and **7-Level-5-Communications-new-version.pdf**).

Further links:

[www.ncse.ie](http://www.ncse.ie) National Council for Special Education

[www.nqai.ie](http://www.nqai.ie) National Qualifications Authority of Ireland

[www.heai.ie/en/access](http://www.heai.ie/en/access) Higher Education Authority - National Office for Equity of Access

## 1st day afternoon

### Visit to St. Michael's House Training Centre, Coolock



*Edgar, Rory and Inge (left to right)*

Welcome by **Julie Dempsey**, Short-Term Training Centre (STTC) Manager, and **Eilin de Paor**, Chair of the STTC Development Group. St. Michael's is a local provider of services to people with moderate, severe and profound general learning disabilities (see WORD document **1-St-Michaels-House.doc**). It is a voluntary body with staff paid completely by public funding / state. The target students are aged 18 - 21 years, afterwards following usually a supported employment model. This year, 17 new people ('service users') entered, while usually only about 8 do. At the centre they can practice their independence skills and are trained mainly to access the community. It is currently planned (together with Killester College) to move more towards integrating further education skills. The plan is to replace the fixed programme (9:15 - 16:00) by something more flexible, e.g. in combination with a 'normal' college. During their stay at St. Michael's students can gather 2 to 3 samples of work experience (unpaid) as well. The attempt is to start earlier with job related activities. At the end of their 3 year stay, they will not get a certification, but for some of the programmes / courses a certification is underway, expected to be accepted Easter 2012. St. Michael's is currently working with FETAC on establishing quality assurance procedures. However, not all courses will be certified due to stay flexible in addressing individual needs. Even if most of the target group will not be able to achieve level 4 (e.g. at Rory's college), it is important to see for students that there is a level 4, where they could try out or get an idea of at least.

## 2nd day morning

Start at Killester College of Further Education, Killester, Dublin 5

([www.killestercollege.ie](http://www.killestercollege.ie) Killester College of Further Education)

Presentation of **Rory** O'Sullivan, Principal of Killester College (see presentation **2-Killester-College.ppt**)

Additions / comments to the presentation:

CDVEC = City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee

The college started in 2003 to join the Disability Support Service (DSS)

DSS principal's manual and study skills manual can be downloaded from [www.cdvec.ie](http://www.cdvec.ie) download section

Core VTOS = long term unemployed

Of 550 in total 102 day students declared learning support needs

No. 1 barrier: problems with self confidence, self esteem, self belief

On the journey towards inclusion, staff has informal meetings to exchange what works in inclusive education and what not

If expectations are low, achievements will also be low. Provide the support and expect the performance, both from learners and from staff.

"Building capacity in KCFE" graph shows upper line the students who declared support needs and the bottom line the students who receive support by the disability officer. The gap shows to what extend inclusive education is already classroom practice.

In 2000-2001, 1 out of 3 students left before the end of a course, in 2009-2010, 1 out of 5 did. D = distinction (highest grade), M = merit (second highest grade), U = unsuccessful.

Statistics presented at "Annual Progression Survey for 2009/2010" show data collected 4 - 5 months after leave of students.

Surveys of students' opinion take place with a response rate of > 80%. The question if they would recommend courses to others was answered with about 95% positively.

Killester is currently handling 17 different budgets.

**Gerry O'Brian** (former student) gave a presentation (see presentation **3-Gerry-O-Brian.ppt**). He had long times of absence from education in the age of 4 to 16 years due to surgeries, during which parents took over education. The E4 project gave him the opportunity to enter mainstream education and to up-skill on ICT, communications and personal effectiveness. Meanwhile he has found employment as a clerical assistant (at CRC).

Text from the 50th anniversary brochure (see PDF document **5-Killester-College-50th-Anniv-Book.pdf**), written by Gerry:

*My name is Gerry O'Brien. I was born with Cerebral Palsy. This is story of my educational experience. I attended school in Sandymount Clinic, which is now Enable Ireland. This time was marked by many long absences for surgery etc., including stays at St. Anthony's, Mount Merrion and the Orthopaedic Hospital, Clontarf. During this time my family played an active role in assisting my learning, helping me to learn to read etc. When I was 16 I was assessed in the Central Remedial Clinic (CRC) and it was recommended that I attend Adult Literacy Classes in Mountjoy Sq to prepare me for vocational training in the CRC. I attended these classes for two years.*

*Since that time I have worked in the Sheltered Employment Workshop in the CRC. During this time I would also do various jobs for staff throughout the CRC and this resulted in me moving on to a Community Employment Scheme, my position being that of a clerical assistant.*

*While I enjoyed my job, there was always part of me that felt I had missed out on a large part of my education. I began thinking about returning to education to upgrade my literacy skills and learning about computers to help me do my job better. It was at this time that I was approached about taking part in the Education for Employment (E4) Project in Killester College.*

*I agreed to give it a go and take up the opportunity. I discovered that when I did go back that the course had a lot to offer. I studied a range of subjects including, Communications, Desktop Publishing, Maths for Life, PowerPoint. I discovered that as I was out of school for a long time it was difficult to get the brain cells working again! But I stuck with it and I enjoyed it even though there was a lot involved.*

*I graduated with my class from my course, Introduction to Computer Applications, in May 2006 with a FETAC Level 4 certificate. I felt over the moon at achieving something that I never thought I would achieve in my life. After this I was faced with the next question – did I want to go back to study at the next level?*

*I was a bit reluctant to go back but I was persuaded to as I needed to complete the next level in order to have the skills needed in the workplace. So I went back and enrolled on the Computerised Office Skills course – a FETAC level 5. With the help of Rory, the Principal of the College, the teachers and the staff of the E4 Project, I managed to complete the course.*

Main points mentioned by him: *"Let students believe in themselves!" "I did not allow teachers to treat me as a disabled person" He had several different personal assistants while he was at the college. "It is a good challenge, because you teach them a lot of things you forgot last time with the previous personal assistant"*

**Áine Lawlor** (current student) gave her presentation (see presentation **4-Aine-Lawlor.ppt**). She went to Trinity college for two years, where she found out that she is a visual learner. With that knowledge she learned that e.g. handouts, coloured graphics, and spider diagrams are helpful for her. She is now enrolled in a Childcare course at Killester

College, again for a prolonged duration of two years, now being in the second year. As she has problems following written instructions, she requires a support worker or asks the tutor or classmates to break down assignments into smaller tasks to get organised. She enjoys especially group work or team work. With regard to a future job, she feels well prepared due to her work experiences.

**Phil McCabe** reported on the E4 project, and how it has challenged and influenced classroom practice. She described the project as an opportunity to experiment with methods, to try out but also sometimes to fail. She also introduced a teacher evaluation at the end of the year, which she uses to reflect upon her own practices and to improve.

Classroom visits were following. Huge variety of disabilities are represented in the classrooms, yet most of them invisible to outside viewers like us.

## 2nd day afternoon

### Central Remedial Clinic (CRC) - Training and Development Centre, Clontarf, Dublin 3

CRC is a national provider of services to people with physical disabilities (see WORD document **6-CRC.doc**).

Welcome by Louise McCormack, Jonathan, Darren and Conny. **Lousie** gave a powerpoint presentation on the basic principles of CRC work in that field. Culture of learned dependency. A minimum of 2 placements of up to 6 weeks a year for work experience is part of the programmes, either on block or spread across the year.

**Jonathan** presented a video that showcased the work happening during the year, e.g. role plays to rehearse situations like interviews and to discuss on it afterwards.

**Conny** was presenting her speech with an emphasis on equality, followed by **Darren's** presentation. He highlighted the variety of course contents (e.g. healthy living, relaxation techniques, personal care, losing weight) and that he is very proud of himself to have finished the courses.

Walk through the classrooms, and talk with students.

Session with trainers

**Tom** (Fás) gave a short overview on funding issues. Currently, funding covers about 15,000 Euro / year / person. From next year onwards programmes will be tendered. The National Skills Plan is underlying everything.

The guidance model was seen as not as intensive as in Europe. A general discussion followed on the major changes taking place currently, and the risk to lose the good things achieved in the past decades in that process.

A major problem / challenge mentioned was that students often have no direction when they arrive at CRC.

With regard to work experiences, up to 24 students are supported and trained to get in touch with companies and to show up there and collect their experiences. CRC tries to provide only minimal support to both the student and the company to avoid over protection. Reflection was considered an essential part of the work experiences. A problem was identified that with the certification needs courses are getting more academic, which is challenging both for the organisations and the students. The transitional phase the whole system currently undergoes makes it difficult for all involved.