

ACCS

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Cumann na Scoileanna Pobail is Cuimsitheacha Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools

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ACCS Education Conference 2013: "Preparing for the Junior Cycle 2014"

The theme of this year's Education Conference, held in the Hodson Bay Hotel on April 17th, 2013 was "Preparing for the Junior Cycle 2014".

Over 100 delegates attended the one-day conference on a topic that is preoccupying every principal's mind as schools head into the last year before the new Junior Cycle Framework is introduced. We were looking to some of our schools involved in the NCCA network schools for advice and exemplification on how to proceed with the new programme. We were not disappointed!

Ms. Denise Kelly, Education Officer in the NCCA introduced key skills to delegates and demonstrated the wealth of material available on key skills on the NCCA website. The toolkits available on 'Managing Myself', 'Working with Others' and 'Managing Information and Thinking' are invaluable to any staff who are embarking on introducing key skills into their teaching and learning.

Ms. Irene Stone from St. Mark's Community School, one of the NCCA network schools, gave a very practical and enlightening description of how her school started introducing key skills in September 2012 and how engagement and satisfaction of both teacher and learner improved as a result. Delegates felt encouraged and well directed following this presentation.

The third speaker at the conference was Professor Claire Wyatt-Smith, Executive Dean of the Faculty of Education in ACU (Australian Catholic University). Claire has been 'on loan' to the NCCA over the past couple of months to support their work in the area of assessment. Her extensive research and experience of assessment in Queensland have been invaluable to the NCCA, the SEC and the DES in developing both summative and formative assessment in a school based setting. The new assessment system envisaged by the DES is a totally new model for the Irish system, with teacher assessment and moderation. This was the first time that most of the delegates were informed about what the model might look like. The 'leap' required by all stakeholders was very well articulated by Claire and her description of how assessment and judgement have become collaborative enterprises in Queensland, how assessment has become a shared enterprise with students and how the teacher's role has extended to inducting students into the notion of 'quality' was exciting, challenging and daunting in equal measure for all delegates!

Ms. Leona Harrington from St. Colmcille's Community School, Knocklyon, another of the NCCA network schools, followed with a description of the school's journey with formative assessment. Leona brought delegates through the school's approach to changing assessment practice including research into why and how to change. Aspects researched include meeting time, collaboration, questioning students,



Education Conference presenters: L-R: Ms. Irene Stone (St. Mark's CS, Tallaght), Ms. Denise Kelly (NCCA), Ms. Eileen Salmon (ACCS), Professor Claire Wyatt-Smith (Australian Catholic University), Ms. Leona Harrington (St. Colmcille's CS, Knocklyon)

experimenting with different types of assessment and different configurations of classroom layout. Knocklyon teachers found the feedback from students inspirational and encouraging. Leona spoke about how fundamental the change has been. Students have to change also! "As well as changing hearts and minds of teachers, we need to change the hearts and minds of students".

At this stage delegates were feeling very daunted by the scale of the reform that is proposed in the Junior Cycle Framework but, following lunch, Denise Kelly demonstrated that schools, who can "only start from where you are", can take a step-by-step approach in the process. Denise outlined how schools could develop their own curriculum with a wide range of supports from the NCCA website. She described how short courses could be developed and generally reassured delegates that not only were their schools well able to accommodate the changes necessary, but many teachers were already engaged in key skills in their teaching without naming it.

Ms. Rita McCabe, Principal in St. Mary's College Naas then brought delegates through different Junior Cycle timetable options. As a timetabler of many years' experience herself, Rita was able to give a very detailed, practical and understandable exposition of the process.

After a short question and answer session the conference concluded. It was a very intensive day for all concerned, but all delegates found the presentations either very helpful or helpful and felt enabled to commence or continue the journey to Junior Cycle reform back in their own schools.

Presentations available on the ACCS website: www.accs.ie

- Implementing key skills from St. Mark's Community School
- Presentation on assessment from St. Colmcille's Community School, Knocklyon
- Timetabling presentation from St. Mary's College, Naas
- "Getting Started" presentation by NCCA

Research Alive! Conference

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This conference took place on May 11, 2013 in Coláiste Bríde, Clondalkin and was co-hosted by the Centre for Effective Services (CES), the NCCA and the Teaching Council.

The conference brought together teachers, researchers and other stakeholders to discuss and explore teachers' experience of and access to educational research.

The convenors of the conference had conducted an online survey of registered teachers to ascertain the teachers' experience of educational research including the frequency of engaging with research in various ways. Over 4,000 teachers participated in the survey. The findings of the survey were disseminated by Professor Mark Morgan who concluded that teachers have a very positive attitude towards research, engaged with it and understood the professional importance of research. There were few age or sector differences in those who were engaged in research. Teachers got involved in research as a result of curriculum changes, in-service or reaction of students, while those who didn't get involved in research stated that lack of time was the primary reason. Professor Morgan concluded that research should be recast and made accessible to a wider audience, away from statistical analysis with means and standard deviations!

In the afternoon Philippa Cordingley, Chief Executive of the Centre for the Use of Research and Evidence in Education (CUREE) in the UK gave a very engaging presentation of how schools can become centres for the best type of research to improve teaching and learning. Philippa gave examples of such schools and demonstrated that school improvement resulted when:

- Staff needs were analysed.
- School got reliable data on student achievement.
- Staff collaborated and used their own expertise to co-coach, peer-plan, establish R&D teams, and accept that they all had strengths and weaknesses: "reciprocal vulnerability".
- Sought specialist expertise to raise expectations, to illustrate possibilities, to challenge "group think" and focus on highest impact (doing few things really well).
- Leadership modelled (joined in R&D, co-coaching), prioritised, evaluated and provided tools and protocols for coaching, debriefing, department meetings.
- Outcomes were examined.

The final presenters were two teachers, Carina Carey and Michael Lawlor from Davis College in Mallow, who described how their school's work on Continuous Professional Development led to the formation of an Academic Council in the school. As well as a committed and enthusiastic staff, the teachers were emphatic about the key role of the principal as instructional leader, giving a high value to the council's role, empowering the council to make decisions, promoting distributive leadership and supporting the establishment of a Research Repository.

In the discussion that followed the following points were made:

- The cost issue is major for individuals and schools in accessing research evidence.
- One of the advantages of research is finding out that you are not alone! Other teachers, other schools have experienced your problems. The beauty of research is that you can find out how others tried to solve the problems.
- Some schools are engaging in research around the Junior Cycle at the moment, but this research has been done and is available on the NCCA website. No need to reinvent the wheel.
- Research and CPD have to be normalised as part of a teacher's life. Time and resources for research should be intrinsic to the profession of teaching.

At the conclusion of the conference the following announcements were made:

- The NCCA is making Research Grants available over the summer based on classroom teachers' enquiry into classroom assessment practice. Watch out for these bursaries on the NCCA website.
- The Teaching Council is actively promoting teacher professional development in two ways:
 - World Teachers Day on 5th October, 2013.
 - From September 1, 2013, all registered teachers will have access to "Edscope" on a one year trial basis. This website will give teachers full access to 1,700 journals and other publications.

Podcasts of the presentations at the conference are available on the NCCA website www.ncca.ie.

School Placement

The term "school placement" is replacing the term "teaching practice" to describe the experience that a student teacher will have in our schools. It is a critical part of initial teacher education (ITE) and is designed to give the student teacher an opportunity to experience teaching and learning in a real environment.

Since 2012/2013, all undergraduate programmes of teacher education (concurrent programmes) are now four or five years in duration, and from 2014, all post-graduate (PGDE) programmes will be two years in duration.

The increased length of these programmes is to facilitate further time spent in hosting schools. While each post-graduate programme will have its own time-in-school commitments (from 200 – 250 hours), the Teaching Council requires that the second half of the programme includes at least one block placement for a minimum of ten weeks.

As well as direct teaching to a designated class, the school-based element should ideally include planning, assessment of and for learning, observation, professional conversations and feedback, attendance at staff meetings, and engagement with school development planning.

The school principal has a pivotal role to play in leading a whole-school approach to school placement. There needs to be a School Placement Policy in each school (template

available). This policy will be formulated by the Board of Management, in consultation with the whole school community. It is a matter for the school BOM and principal to identify the school's capacity to facilitate student placement, in consultation with appropriate staff. It is they who assign student teachers to co-operating teachers and who facilitate co-operating teachers availing of discretionary time while student teachers are teaching independently.

The role of the co-operating teacher(s) is very well defined in the new structure. As well as introducing the student teacher to the students, the plan of work for the class, class rules and procedures, the roles of other staff directly involved with the students in the class, they afford the student teacher opportunities to observe their teaching. In turn, they observe the student teacher's practice and provide feedback to the student teacher in an encouraging and sensitive manner.

A well-managed school placement is mutually beneficial for all those involved. It can present opportunities for sharing ideas and new methodologies, foster discussion on teaching and learning, and offer a variety of opportunities for real engagement and learning among teachers throughout their careers.

Details of this new model of School Placement will be distributed to schools by the Teaching Council in the near future.

Counselling Supervision for Guidance Counsellors

What is supervision for guidance counsellors?

Counselling Supervision (not to be confused with the DES supervision and substitution scheme) is a formal and collaborative process intended to help guidance counsellors maintain ethical and professional standards of practice in their counselling work with their students.

Being 'in supervision' is a requirement/recommendation not just for guidance counsellors but for any professionally qualified counsellor in their personal counselling work with clients. In other words if you decide to seek counselling for a personal issue or for your child, that the counsellor, as well as having a professional qualification, 'is in supervision' is one of the checks that ensures you are receiving a professional and ethical service.

Why?

Personal counselling is only one aspect of the guidance counsellor's work. Guidance counsellors deal with issues as they arise for students, but it is one area that can cause stress, anxiety and overwhelming feelings in their workload. They deal routinely with depression, anxiety, stress, suicidal tendencies, pregnancy, gender issues, substance abuse, physical or sexual abuse, physical/psychological bullying etc. Therefore they need a place to process and reflect on how they are managing these issues.

- Counselling Supervision provides guidance counsellors with the opportunity to discuss and monitor their work with their students.
- It is intended to ensure that the needs of the students are being addressed.
- It helps to monitor the effectiveness of the therapeutic interventions.
- Supervisors need to be alert to any prejudices and recognise value difference and to raise awareness of these so that the needs of students may be met with more sensitivity.

(All supervisors must meet minimum standards of training laid down by Teacher Education Section)

It is essential that guidance counsellors attend supervision not alone for providing the best service for our students and for guidance counsellors own mental health but also legally it is important for the school to ensure all ethical standards are maintained throughout the counselling work. It is the view of the Institute of Guidance Counsellors that only persons who hold a professionally recognised counselling qualification and are in on-going supervision for their counselling work are deemed to be operating in an ethical manner protected by law.

When?

The support of school principals for supervision is essential. Their willingness to facilitate guidance counsellors attendance at this service, by not timetabling them for class contact on the designated afternoon, has been central to the success of the supervision scheme to date.

Currently, Teacher Education Section (TES) provides 5 sessions of group supervision for guidance counsellors working in second-level schools and PLC colleges each year (In addition to this some principals/schools pay for extra supervision for their guidance counsellors who have heavy counselling workloads. Some guidance counsellors also undertake extra supervision at their own expense.) All supervisors engaged in the scheme must meet minimum standards of training.

May we ask for your continued support by releasing guidance counsellors from timetabled class work on the appropriate afternoon? With the principals' support, understanding and valuing of counselling supervision, they will continue to empower guidance counsellors in providing the support service our students and schools need and deserve.

*Ms. Eta Danabar, Crescent Comprehensive, Limerick
Institute of Guidance Counsellors*

Supporting a better transition from second level education: Key Directions and Next Steps

The problems of student transition from second level education to higher education were spelt out at the 'Transitions & Transactions' Conference in September 2011. Key stakeholders have been addressing the problem areas in a collaborative way and a paper published in March 2013 outlined the progress made and commitments they are making to support students for a better transition.

The paper contains three key commitments to:

1. Reduce the number of level 8 degree programmes in higher education and make the programmes more broadly-based.
2. Reduce the number of grading bands in the Leaving Certificate from 14 to 8.
(A1,A2,B1,B2,B3,C1,C2... To A1,A2,B,C,D...)
3. Address problematic predictability in the Leaving Certificate exams.

How will these commitments help the transition?

1. Reducing number of level 8 degrees and making programmes more broadly-based:
Much of the "heat" in the "points race" arises from those courses where places are most limited and thus points are highest. A move to greater common entry would be challenging but would significantly alter the dynamic of competition for university places.
Over-specialisation early in undergraduate programmes leads to confusion for students selecting courses of study.
2. Reduce the number of grading bands in the Leaving Certificate:
Those who advocate the use of broader grade bands believe that the use of narrow grade bands puts pressure on students to achieve marginal gains in examination performance, and as a consequence focuses excessive student attention on the detail of the assessment process rather than the achievement of broader learning objectives.

3. Address problematic predictability in the Leaving Certificate:
There is a need to differentiate between desirable and problematic predictability when examining this commitment. Predictability refers to anything that students might know or guess about an examination in advance of sitting it.
Some forms of predictability are positive, such as knowing how long the examination will be, what form it will take, or knowing that it will be faithful to the syllabus. Also, consistency in structure and style, and in the use of language, helps to ensure that students know what they are being asked to do, and assists students in preparing for an examination. These kinds of predictability do not undermine the purpose of the exam, and are an important feature of quality in all exams and tests.
Problematic predictability on the other hand is a threat to the validity of the exam. If a student can second-guess what questions will be asked and can have an exact match between the question asked and a prepared answer, then all the examination is testing is rote learning, not understanding.

The changes that the paper commits to will not affect students doing Leaving Certificate in 2013 or 2014. There is still more work to do before final conclusions are reached on the issues in the report. There should be a full implementation plan before the end of 2013, with clear plans for phased implementation beginning for students entering Fifth Year in 2014.

"Major changes will not occur without due notice being given to schools, parents and students."

See full report on The Department of Education website:
www.education.ie

Three Stages of Community Schools: Ballinamore Community School established 2013



Bishop Leo O'Reilly turning the first sod to commence construction of the new Ballinamore Community School watched by Staff, Board of Management and Parents Association.



Mr. Ciarán Flynn, General Secretary of ACCS and Mr. Malachy Molloy, President of ACCS helping out with the new build!



Model of the new school that is scheduled to open in 2014.

Official Opening of Kildare Town Community School established in 2011 by An Taoiseach, Mr. Enda Kenny, TD



Taoiseach Enda Kenny cuts the ribbon to signal the official opening of Kildare Town Community School.



L-R: Mr. Pat Flynn (Principal), Mr. Ciarán Flynn (General Secretary ACCS), an Taoiseach Enda Kenny, Ms. Áine Moran (Deputy Principal) and Mr. Malachy Molloy (President of ACCS).

Coolmine Community School established in 1972 celebrating its 40th anniversary with the President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins



Mr. Ciaran Flynn, General Secretary of ACCS with Coolmine's Principals: Ms. Eileen Salmon (2000 – 2011), Ms. Patricia Mc Phillips (2011 to date), Mr. Seán Ó Beacháin (1972 – 2000).



President Michael D. Higgins addressing the students, staff and guests at Coolmine's 40th anniversary celebration.