

Submission 2.02 National College of Ireland (NCI)

NCI's mission 'To Change Lives through Education' has guided its evolution for 70 years. One of the

defining factors of the College is the ability to move from concept to practical solutions. To change

the access and widening participation paradigm nationally NCI wishes to extend to DFHERIS and the

HEA the College's philosophy of 'No-One Left Behind'. Each person lost to education is a system

failure. This submission offers practical solutions which the College believes strongly are worthy of

further discussion.

Appendix 1 National College of Ireland Profile

1. NCI has been an annual recipient of free fees and core grant for CAO students since 1994. Initially

receiving funding for 925 students', this number increased to 1,000 in 2018/2019.

2. NCI was awarded a capital grant from the Department of Education and Skills, receiving €8.9 million in

2002/03 towards the cost of the building at the Mayor Street Campus. The Department of Education &

Skills also holds a legal charge on the Campus building.

3. NCI is a registered company limited by guarantee with no share capital, and a registered charity.

4. NCI students receive SUSI grants as the College is an approved institution under the 1999 Higher

Education Grants Scheme.

5. NCI participates in both DARE and HEAR admissions schemes for students with disabilities or from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds. NCI also receives funding under HEA's Fund for Students with

a Disability and the Student Assistance Fund.

6. NCI provides HEA with full statistical data on its educational activity annually.

7. NCI receives research grants from both EU and Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) for academic research in

collaboration with HEI's (Ireland and EU) and corporations.

8. NCI administers the ISSI student survey annually participating with other designated HEI's, has achieved

4 Stars under the QS Stars HEI ranking, is Athena SWAN accredited (Bronze) and is an Autism Friendly

Campus as designated by AsIAM.

9. NCI is strongly aligned with DFHERIS Statement of Strategy 2021-2023:

a. NCI is largest School of Computing in Ireland with 2,300 students (undergraduate and

postgraduate), and largest single provider of Springboard+ Programmes in the State.

b. NCI achieves 97% placement of graduates into employment (Sunday Times survey).

c. NCI is sole provider of professional apprenticeships in International Services and in Recruitment

Practice; one of the first HEI's to respond to Government's call for higher level apprentices.

d. NCI provides multiple access routes into higher education through flexible delivery including parttime, online and accelerated (2-year) honours degree programmes.

Further Education students

access NCI programmes from Level 6, progressing to Level 7 and 8 programmes on National

Qualifications Framework.

e. NCI developed the Early Learning Initiative in 2008 and continues to provide educational services

to c.10,000 individuals, families and children in Dublin' Inner City, addressing educational

disadvantage in literacy and numeracy.

10. NCI has a collaboration with Maynooth University to deliver PhD programmes, and has representatives

on the National Forum for Enhancement of Teaching and Learning, the Regional Skills Forum and the IUA

Access Steering Group for HEI's.

Appendix 2 New Zealand Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy

New Zealand's first Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy was launched in August 2019.

The Strategy

sets out a shared understanding of what young New Zealanders want and need for good wellbeing,

what government is doing and how others can help.

The strategy was developed with input from 10,000 people – including over 6000 children and young

people, who shared what makes for a good life and what gets in the way. It also draws on the best

evidence from social science and cultural wellbeing frameworks.

Led by the Prime Minister, the Minister for Children and a newly established Child Wellbeing Unit,

the work is underpinned by new child wellbeing and poverty reduction legislation which ensures

ongoing political accountability for reducing child poverty and requires successive governments to

develop and publish a strategy to improve the wellbeing of all children, with a particular focus on

those with greater needs.

The newly published Strategy provides a unifying framework and way of aligning efforts across

government and with other sectors. It includes an aspirational vision, nine guiding principles, and six

wellbeing outcomes that outline what children and young people want and need for a good life. The

current Programme of Action that accompanies the Strategy brings together 75 actions and 49

supporting actions led by 20 government agencies. While the Strategy is aimed at improving the

wellbeing outcomes for all young New Zealanders under 25 years old, it also reflects the strong call

to urgently reduce the current inequity of outcomes.

The Government has prioritised the wellbeing of children and young people who are living in poverty

and disadvantaged circumstances, and those with greatest needs, including children and young

people of interest to Oranga Tamariki (New Zealand's child protection and youth justice agency).

This involves work to address child poverty, family violence, and inadequate housing, and improving

early years, learning support and mental wellbeing for children, young people and their families.

A set of indicators has been established to help inform an annual report to Parliament on

achievement of the outcomes. The legislation also requires that the Strategy be reviewed at least

every three years, to ensure it continues to address the issues and challenges facing New Zealand's

children and young people.

Many of the issues facing children, young people and their families are complex, stubborn and intergenerational, so change will take time. It will also require a unified response, so the Strategy seeks to

support, encourage and mobilise action by others, and empower and enable people and

communities to drive the solutions that work for them.

Note: For more information go to www.childyouthwellbeing.govt.nz.

Source: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, New Zealand Government.

Appendix 3 Profile of Early Learning Initiative

ELI Services

In addition to the Home Visiting programme which provides support to families and young children

from 0 to 6 ELI provides a range of services all concentrated on increasing participation in the

education system. For children to succeed, their parents need a positive local community

educational network and infrastructure, which will give them the support they require to develop

their parenting skills and support their children through the education system. Using a community

action research approach, ELI operates as a partnership between local parents, early years services,

schools, and companies. It has developed a range of complementary, innovative programmes to

raise the educational aspirations of families and support children and young people in the Docklands

to progress through the education system and on to third level.

ELI's Early Learning Programmes (0-6 years) helps parents to develop children's social, language and

thinking skills from an early age and thereby, ensure that children enter school ready to learn, with

the skills they need to be successful throughout their education. While priority is given to the early

years, we also believe that if students are to progress through the education system, they and their

parents will need the on-going support provided in our Stretch to Learn Programmes (4 years +),

which include various literacy and numeracy projects, the educational guidance programme in 5th

and 6th classes, family celebration awards, and second level tuition along with support for third level

students.

Support for Parents

- ParentChild+ Programme

- o Originally from the United States, ParentChild+ forms a key part of The Early

Learning Initiative's family support programmes. ParentChild+ is an evidence based,

‘learning through play experience’ for parents and their preschool children. It is designed to strengthen the natural bond between parent and child and to encourage a love of learning. It employs a non-directive approach and encourages the parent as the child’s first and best teacher. This programme prepares children for later success in school. ParentChild+ employs specially trained local women as Home Visitors, to model verbal interaction for the parent and child.

- o The Home Visitor visit the family twice a week, in their own home, for two short (1/2 hour) play sessions, which are run during the (primary) school year only. The family then continue the activities in their own time, thereby enabling the ParentChild+ child and his/her siblings to develop their language, literacy, and numeracy skills.

- 0-2 Programme

- o The Area-Based Childhood 0-2 Years Programme aims to provide an integrated programme of intervention and support for children, their parents, and families from pre-birth to two years of age.

- o The programme’s main focus is a home visiting service to offer intervention and support for children, their parents and families. The programme aims to improve children's overall development through the empowerment of parents, and is designed to focus on nutrition, health care, and overall child development.

- o On a weekly basis, for up to an hour, families will be visited in their homes by our trained Home Visitors. As the child becomes older this may move to once a month. The Home Visitors work with the family to strengthen the parents’ skills and build self-esteem, to enable them to believe in their own capabilities and parenting skills. A weekly report is written by the Home Visitors to record the child’s development.

- Restorative Parenting

- o The aim of the Restorative Parenting group is to support healthy parent-child relationships, develop good communication, and assist in building strong and happy families. Being a parent is one of the most challenging roles in life, which is why it is important for parents to support themselves in that role.

o The group meet over an eight-week period and explore the following themes:

- 1. The nurture & structure roles of the parent
- 2. Approaches to dealing with challenging behaviour
- 3. Connecting feelings with needs
- 4. Helping children to identify and name feelings
- 5. Developing a supportive and encouraging relationship
- 6. Connecting with children through play
- 7. The importance of self-care in the parenting role

Literacy and Numeracy Programmes

- Early Numeracy Programmes

o The Early Numeracy Project is funded through the Government's Area-Based Childhood Programme (ABC) and aims to improve children's early numeracy outcomes in Dublin's Docklands and East Inner-City area.

o The project supports early childhood care and education settings and schools to plan and support children's mathematical learning through play based activities while linking this to Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework and Síolta, The Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education.

o It also promotes and supports parental involvement in their child's development, learning and education by providing a variety of home-based activities for parents.

o The ABC Early Numeracy Project uses an exciting and innovative approach to working in partnership with children, parents, educators and the wider community in the Docklands and East Inner City, and builds on earlier work done through the National Early Years Access Initiative (NEYAI) during 2011- 2014.

- Doodle Den

o The Doodle Den Programme, as part of the Area-Based Childhood (ABC) Programme, is an after-school programme designed to promote literacy and offers an intensive, multimedia and highly interactive opportunity for five and six-year-old children (Senior Infants class).

- o One of the key objectives of the ELI is to support the literacy development of the children in the Dublin Docklands and East Inner City. Aimed at improving a range of literacy skills, Doodle Den involves three after-school sessions per week, with each session lasting 1.5 hours, operating throughout the normal school year, over a 36-week period.

- o In addition, the programme has been proven to bring about an improvement in child school attendance, improved engagement with learning outside of the school, and improved relationships with both their parents and with their peers.

- Zoom Ahead with Books

- o The Zoom Ahead with Books project is designed to encourage parental involvement and promote children's enjoyment and motivation to read for pleasure.

- o Each year almost 1000 children and families from 12 local primary schools and services take part, and this project is one of the highlights of the ELI calendar.

- o One of the key objectives of ELI is to support the literacy development of the children in the Docklands. Through its focus on creative expression, the Zoom Ahead project is accessible to all parents in the community regardless of their literacy levels. This year, we are delighted to also be able to share the resources for parents in English, as well as three further languages commonly spoken in our community - Polish, Mandarin and Romanian.

- o Each night over the three week programme the children take home a book from the class library, sit, read and discuss the book with their 'book buddy' and then both draw a picture representing the book.

- o The project finishes with a series of exhibitions of the artwork from the children and book buddies in the schools and NCI, which serves as celebration of commitment and effort of all of the families.

- NCI Inter School Challenges

- o The NCI's inter-school challenges promote the development of children's literacy, numeracy, general knowledge, and social skills through board game challenges.

- o ELI is committed to supporting parents to play an active role in their children's learning, and to facilitating high quality and enjoyable learning opportunities. The inter-school challenges promote the development of the children's literacy, numeracy, general knowledge, and social skills, through playing board games like Monopoly and Rummikub and through interactive table quizzes.

- o ELI provides resources to each school so they can practice in advance of the events at NCI and parents are encouraged to come into the classrooms and work with their children. Parents and children then form teams and represent their schools at NCI.

- Tuition Support

- o NCI offers after-school tuition support programmes in Maths and Irish for students sitting their Junior and Leaving Certificate exams.

- o At NCI we believe that carefully structured after-school tuition support programmes have the potential to make a difference to young peoples' academic success. Each year we organise group tuition support programmes in Maths and Irish, for young people doing their Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate exams. The programmes are run between the NCI campus and local community centres and are facilitated by experienced tutors and/or NCI student volunteers.

- Financial Literacy Programme

- o ELI was awarded funding from Ulster Bank's Skills and Opportunities Fund to develop a financial literacy programme for children aged 4-12 years old attending afterschools in the Dublin Docklands.

- o The programme consists of play-based activities, book reading, arts, and crafts to promote discussions relating to high finance topics such as income, budgeting, saving, borrowing and currency. The aim is to introduce children to financial topics that they would encounter in their everyday lives, which will act as the foundation for them to progress through the education system and obtain the qualifications needed to be successful in the world of work.

- o The Ulster Bank Skills and Opportunities Fund supplied toys, board games, books, as

well as arts and craft materials to each of the four afterschools participating in the programme. As part of the project, the afterschool children were asked to write their own stories to encourage other children to talk about financial topics.

Educational Guidance

- Educational Guidance Programme

- o The Educational Guidance programme was developed for the 5th and 6th classes and aims to highlight the value and importance of further and higher education to secure better life chances.

- o The programme takes a project-based learning approach, with students focusing on honing group-work and problem-solving skills in stage one and exploring a chosen career path in stage two. The programme is designed to explore, with the children and their parents, how the decisions made throughout their education journey can influence their future. These decisions include choosing a second-level school, second-level subjects, subject levels studied and whether to proceed to further and higher education.

- o Students also visit a local company in the docklands area to explore how education translates into the working world.

- o The children's projects are exhibited in the school and NCI and judged by corporate volunteers. Corporate volunteers visit the classes to share their own education story and answer any questions the children may have about second level and college.

- Discover University

- o Discover University is a summer programme held in NCI every June that aims to give young people aged 14-17 the opportunity to experience a taste of life at NCI and to see college as part of their future.

- o Students may apply to one of our four core subject areas of Business, Computing, Early Childhood Education and Care and Psychology. They learn about their chosen subject throughout the week, through groupwork and lectures. Students are mentored and supported by NCI faculty staff and team leaders, who are current NCI

students. The programme also includes visits to exciting and innovative workplaces, as well as workshops, activities, and guest speakers.

- o The programme finishes with a Graduation and Prize-giving Ceremony with families in attendance

- o Discover University is free of charge for young people and priority is given to young people going to school or living in inner city Dublin and Docklands areas.

- Language Café

- o The Language Cafés are run for EAL learners for whom English is an additional language. The term EAL learners refer to learners who speak a language other than English as their first language and need additional support to develop a proficiency in English. EAL learners come from diverse and multilingual backgrounds. EAL learners are often learning a new language at the same time as learning new knowledge, understanding and skills from the National Curriculum in this new language.

- o EAL learners are not all the same and will come into school with varying levels of English language skills, and therefore will not all learn in the same way.

- o EAL learners are typically at a disadvantage and if the learners experience issues at primary and second level then accessing further or higher education will become an issue.

- o At second level DES provide an EAL teacher per 14 students for 2 years. There appear to be issues with EAL teachers having no official syllabus, with students with learning difficulties mixed with EAL students. There are two levels of English language (BICS and CALCS) required yet there does not appear to be widespread knowledge of this. Lack of the correct approach to EAL can impede on a young person's potential to progress. The Language Cafes fill a gap that exists again with the objectives of equity and inclusion.

- Third Level Support

- o The ELI third-level participation grant is a community-based pupil support scheme

for students from Dublin's Inner-City Docklands Area who are attending full-time third-level higher education.

o This programme provides a range of supports for students to fulfil their full potential as learners. The programme offers:

- Participation grant towards the costs of attending third-level education
- Opportunities to attend personal development, study, and career-related workshops and to participate in peer mentoring and outreach to local primary and secondary school students

Quality Support and CPD Programmes

- Síolta & Aistear Learning Network

o A key objective of ELI's work with early learning providers is to promote Síolta standards in preschools and implement Aistear in participating services.

o Síolta is the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education. Since January 2010, the Early Learning Initiative has been providing mentoring and training for nine Early Years Education Services in the Docklands area to support them in implementing Síolta Standards in their practice.

o ELI integrates all work on these standards with Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework. A key goal of the CPD programmes is to support the full implementation of Aistear in these settings, as a fundamental tool in the planning of learning experiences and assessment for learning.

- Restorative Practice

o Funded by the Government's Area-Based Childhood (ABC) Programme, Restorative Practice is an approach to building and maintaining interpersonal relationships, resolving conflict, and repairing damaged relationships.

o One of the key objectives of ELI is to support the emotional and social development of the children and families in the Dublin Docklands and East Inner-City area.

Restorative Practice provides a framework that can support a wide range of organisations and sectors, including schools, early years services, youth services,

workplaces, communities and families – while complementing and supporting other approaches, such as coaching, mediation, and restorative justice. Its aim is to build strong, happy communities and to manage conflict or tensions, by actively developing good relationships and resolving conflict in a healthy manner.

o Restorative Practice is a collaborative and fair approach to working in partnership with children, parents, educators and the wider community in the Dublin Docklands and East Inner City.

- Mentoring Support Programme

o Funded by the Government's Area-Based Childhood (ABC) Programme, Restorative Practice is an approach to building and maintaining interpersonal relationships, resolving conflict, and repairing damaged relationships.

o One of the key objectives of ELI is to support the emotional and social development of the children and families in the Dublin Docklands and East Inner-City area.

Restorative Practice provides a framework that can support a wide range of organisations and sectors, including schools, early years services, youth services, workplaces, communities and families – while complementing and supporting other approaches, such as coaching, mediation, and restorative justice. Its aim is to build strong, happy communities and to manage conflict or tensions, by actively developing good relationships and resolving conflict in a healthy manner.

o Restorative Practice is a collaborative and fair approach to working in partnership with children, parents, educators and the wider community in the Dublin Docklands and East Inner City.

Appendix 4 Integrating research, capacity building and practice to improve educational outcomes

Title: Integrating research, capacity building and practice to improve educational outcomes

Abstract:

As a higher-education provider, the National College of Ireland (NCI) has, through its Early Learning

Initiative (ELI), a unique relationship with its local community. NCI partners with a range of 'cross

border' stakeholders, use community action research to address educational disadvantage. Over

7,500 children, parents and professionals actively engage with ELI each year.

Evaluations have found

that the educational aspirations and attainment of children and young people in the area has

increased. As the 'bridge' between the different interest groups, NCI enables stakeholders to create

knowledge; learn from each other's experiences and work together to find solutions to common

problems.

Introduction

Since its inception in 1951, National College of Ireland (NCI) has distinguished itself in the provision

of access routes to higher education and in its unique relationship with its local community. Through

its Early Learning Initiative (ELI), a community-based educational initiative aimed at addressing

educational disadvantage, NCI has developed a range of innovative programmes to raise the

educational aspirations of families and support children and young people to progress through the

education system and on to third level. Operating as a partnership between NCI, parents, public

health nurses, early years services, schools, community and corporate organisations; all involved in

ELI are committed to providing the best possible education for children and young people both at

home and at school (Bleach 2010).

This paper examines the key elements of NCI's partnership with its local community in improving

outcomes for children and creating a high-achieving cohesive community. It describes the

community action research process used along with the benefits and challenges of doing this

innovative 'cross-border' work as part of NCI's 'third mission' activities.

National College of Ireland (NCI)

NCI is a third level learning, teaching and research institution with an unwavering commitment to

widening access to higher education. In 2002, NCI re-located from its original site on Sandford Road,

Ranelagh to its current, purpose-built facilities at the IFSC on Mayor Square. With the development

of the Irish Financial Services Centre (IFSC) and the Dublin Docklands, the Dublin Docklands

Development Authority (DDDA) wanted an academic institution that would develop strong links with

the local community and help to address educational disadvantage. NCI was selected by the DDDA

to fulfil this brief due to its history and ethos, both of which remain core to its mission today.

The area in which NCI is located in the Dublin Docklands contains significant clusters of high

deprivation, which are masked by the extreme influx of largely affluent people in the wake of the

inner city's gentrification (Haase 2008). The level of educational disadvantage appears more acute as

it co-exists with modern knowledge sectors and international companies, which attract the most

highly educated people (Dublin City Council 2013). Over 4,500 families, more than 25% of which

include children under the age of 15 years, live in the area. All of the schools in the area have

disadvantaged status and six primary schools having the highest concentration of disadvantage in

Ireland. A considerable proportion of parents with children in these schools are early school leavers

with 28% listing Junior Certificate (taken at 15) as their highest level of education.

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Regarded as 'our college' by the local community, NCI is an iconic symbol in the locality, providing a

visible tangible reminder to the local community that third level education is not only a right but

within reach.

They're also making children in our school aware of the college – the National College of

Ireland – it's just on their doorstep and by inviting us into that – the NCI [...] the children are

more aware of third-level, and they're more aware of what a college is [...] so maybe it may

influence them when they get to Leaving Cert to [...] hopefully go on to college

[DS-3] (Share et al 2011, p. 48)

When NCI relocated to the Dublin Docklands, Early Learning Initiative (ELI) was established, at the

request of the local community, to address the generational, long-term problems of social

deprivation, poverty, poor educational attainment and mass unemployment in the area. The aim

was to 'change lives through education' (ELI 2016) through the provision from birth, an integrated

programme of activities, training and support for children, parents and educators.

There is a symbiotic relationship between ELI and NCI. While ELI is a discreet centre within NCI with

its own dedicated staff and Advisory Boards, NCI takes full responsibility for the financial,

management, contractual, reporting and governance requirements of ELI. NCI staff from various

Departments works closely with ELI to ensure its programmes are delivered to a high standard.

In addition, there is a great collaboration on teaching, practice and research projects, particularly

where there are clear benefits to NCI, ELI, staff, students and the local community.

Engagement

between academics, researchers and practitioners afford all involved with valuable opportunities to

inform each other's work. ELI staff sit on many of the committees in NCI and have been involved in

the development of and marketing of NCI programmes. Similarly, NCI faculty have supported the

development and delivery of ELI's programmes. Through ELI, NCI students get practical experience

of assessments, evaluations and research methods in real-life situations, while the data is used by

ELI as evidence of outcomes and impact.

NCI is regarded as a safe place within the community, where in the words of a local nine-year old,

'Good things happen'. Holding events in NCI gives children and their families a positive experience of

a third level institution as well as making them more aware of third level education in general (ELI

2012). As a result of this engagement with the NCI building, staff and students, some of whom come

from the local community, the local community feels comfortable in NCI and uses it as an accessible

point of advice, information and referral for educational issues.

While ELI enhances NCI's reputation across a range of community, statutory and corporate

stakeholder groups, NCI provides assurance to these stakeholders that ELI is committed to the

highest standards in terms of corporate governance and programme delivery. Publications in peerreviewed journals; conference presentations and submissions on national policies by members of

the ELI team and their NCI colleagues helps to heighten NCI's research visibility, both nationally and

internationally.

Early Learning Initiative (ELI)

A lot of work has been done locally and elsewhere to address educational disadvantage and

improve access to third level education. However, the focus was on addressing educational

disadvantage both in later childhood and through the formal education system (ELI 2012). A major

gap was the lack of an integrated approach to supporting parents and the communities in which

they live to provide positive home learning environments, where children's social, language and

mathematical concepts and skills are developed from an early age. Through ELI, NCI provides parents

with the positive local community educational network needed to develop their parenting skills and

support their children through the education system.

ELI is a complex community initiative (Share et al. 2011) consisting of multiple interventions, which

operate at multiple levels (e.g. individual, family, service systems and community levels) and with

multiple stakeholders with a range of ideas and perspectives. Influenced by Bronfenbrenner's

Ecological Model of Child Development (1979), ELI aims to enhance the child's complex interactions

with their immediate environment and the people and objects within it. Funding for ELI's activities

comes from the Irish Government along with philanthropic, corporate and individual donations.

Chevalier & Buckles' (2013, p.32) image of 'Multitudes of nodes, flows and connecting lines give rise

to rhizomatic growth rather than clearly delineated systems' is a good description of ELI.

Research from a wide range of countries has found that early intervention contributes significantly

to putting children from disadvantaged backgrounds on the path to development and success in

education (Heckman 2006; OECD 2006; Melhuish 2011). At 3 years of age, there are already big

differences in language and mathematical development between children from rich and poor

backgrounds (Hart & Risley 1995). Those who start school among the least advanced of their class

remain so throughout their schooling and often do not go onto third level. If young people are to

succeed in third level education, they need to begin school with the language, concepts and skills

required for success throughout their educational journey (ELI 2012). Therefore, NCI begins its thirdlevel access initiatives at 18 months and earlier through ELI rather than at 18 years.

ELI's Early Learning Programmes (0-6 years) helps parents to develop children's social, language and

thinking skills from an early age and thereby, ensure that children enter school ready to learn, with

the skills they need to be successful throughout their education. Programmes include home visiting

programmes, parent toddler groups, parenting courses, professional development and mentoring

for Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) practitioners as well as the Parent Child Home

Programme (PCHP).

While priority is given to the early years, we also believe that if students are to progress through the

education system, they and their parents will need the on-going support provided in our Stretch to

Learn Programmes (4 years +), which include various literacy and numeracy projects, the educational

guidance programme in 5th and 6th classes, family celebration awards, and second level tuition along

with support for third level students.

Community Action Research

Since 2005, NCI, through ELI, has been collaborating with parents, public health nurses, early years

services, schools, statutory, voluntary and corporate organisations, to address educational

disadvantage (Bleach 2013). Approximately, eighty one organisations are involved with ELI at local

level. At national level, ELI is involved in Irish Government Programmes, which are co-funded by

Atlantic Philanthropies as well as other organisations that are committed to improving outcomes for

children and their families.

An initial survey of need (Dartington Social Research Unit 2006) found that while local parents had

high educational aspirations for their children, they did not understand their pivotal role and were

not confident that they had the skills to support their children's learning. With support for parents as

the primary educators of their children a priority, involving local people as co-constructors of

programmes (Bleach 2013) and in the decision-making processes was perceived as key to

educational change.

As a result, a community action research (Senge & Scharmer 2001; Bleach 2016) approach was

chosen to develop ELI's programmes. Acknowledging, respecting and utilising the expertise and

experience within the local families and communities is at the heart of the cyclical process, which

revolves around participants coming together to deliver high quality services and share their

learning.

Over the past ten years, the process has evolved from a simplistic 'plan, do, review' model (Lewin

1946) into a developmental process of incremental change, informed by data and judgement that

has led to the significant cumulative evolution of our theory, practice and programmes (Patton

1994). These changes are the result of a multitude of 'dynamic conversations' (Schön 1983) at each

stage of the process through the systematic involvement of children, parents and front-line service

delivery staff in all aspects of programme planning, implementation and evaluation.

Learning networks are a critical element of the community action research approach described

earlier (Bleach 2016). Key criteria for networking are the individual and organisation's commitment

to improving the quality of the service they provide to children and their families along with their

ability to work in partnership with others. Sustaining an ethos of genuine partnership and respect for

all involved in the network is a crucial element of the work for both NCI and ELI. Priority is given to

individuals, organisations and networks that focus on action research, early childhood development,

educational disadvantage and support for parents. Networking with other practitioners, researchers

and policy makers, locally, nationally and internationally, challenges underlying assumptions and

provides fresh insights into both theory and practice. Further, continually engaging with others is

important for ELI to secure funding and influence thinking in the public sphere.

A key strength for both NCI and ELI are the local Home Visitors, who deliver many of ELI's

programmes, including the Parent Child Home Programme (ELI 2012). Most are early school leavers,

who have been employed and trained by NCI. Easily recognisable in their distinctive uniforms, they

are the ambassadors for NCI, ELI and education on the street and provide an accessible point of

contact, information and referral for families on issues relating to education. This has a dual benefit

of ensuring community ownership and creating a ripple effect throughout the area, with more and

more people appreciating and understanding the long-term educational benefits of talking to,

reading and playing with their children.

Since its beginning in 2005, ELI was funded through the generosity of a consortium of socially

minded Irish companies (Bleach 2013). Involving the employees of these companies as volunteers

increases the social capital of the young people in the area and help them develop the knowledge,

skills, attitudes and behaviour needed for employment. Described as 'REAL' people and 'really kind

and nice' by the young people in their evaluations, the volunteers felt that having the opportunity to

meet people who work in the offices surrounding their neighbourhoods would encourage the young

people involved to aspire to work in these companies one day (ELI 2013). These opportunities for

engagement between local young people, companies and their employees is helping to create a

more cohesive high achieving community in the Docklands. As one ten year old said, 'I learned how

to play with new people [corporate volunteers]. I learned lots of things. That anybody can be smart

as long as you try', while another 11 year old stated, 'I really liked getting our feedback because it

made me feel professional' (ELI 2016).

Impact

Approximately, 7,630 children, parents and professionals take part in an ELI programme each year

with satisfaction rates of 99% (ELI 2016). Ten years of using action research has developed a sense of

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ownership and responsibility for the educational welfare of children from all involved. Participants'

skills in working collaboratively to provide a positive, supportive, yet challenging learning

environment for children have increased. Having to structure implicit practices and theories into a

coherent explicit theory of practice, which others can understand and relate to, has helped to

increase the participants' reflective, relational and representational knowledge (Park 1999; 2001).

Evaluations indicate that the educational outcomes for children in the area are improving (Share et

al. 2011; McKeown et al. 2014; ELI 2016). Parents are more engaged in their children's development

and are developing the understanding, skills and knowledge required to support their children's

educational journeys. Up skilling local people to work in programme delivery means that many

families who might otherwise have shied away from involvement have embraced the ELI.

ELI are doing tremendous work in our community. The children are benefiting, the parents

are being educated and the teachers are getting so much support! It is such a positive experience to be part of it and I feel very lucky to be part of it as a Mammy and a teacher!

Keep up the good work (ELI 2016)

All of ELI's stakeholders feel comfortable in NCI and use it as an accessible point of advice,

information and referral for educational issues. There is an enthusiasm and excitement about

learning (Share et al. 2011; Bleach 2013). Relationships between the various stakeholders in the

community have improved with the process "bringing the family and all the educational sections

together, bonding links in the community" and helping "to foster a learning environment where

home and school learning comes together" (Bleach 2013, 258).

Through ELI, NCI

As a result, the 'educational capital' of the community

has increased and the educational and career aspirations of all the stakeholders have been raised.

Challenges

Working with real people within real social systems, people do not act as one might wish and things

do not always go according to plan (Bleach 2013). With evolving programmes and new stakeholders,

each action research cycle is different from the previous one. Ensuring continuity and progression

from one action research cycle to the next, in an evolving, rapidly changing environment of constant

feedback and change (Patton 1994), is important for sustainable programme development and

implementation.

Engaging a range of 'cross border' stakeholders in the action research process and ensuring that all

voices are heard can be challenging. Regular safe opportunities for group reflection and discussion

are critical at each stage of the cycle (Bleach 2013). Leadership from key stakeholders, including NCI,

is important. Encouraging participants to openly question and critique programmes and to amicably

disagree is a key leadership task. The more action research cycles the stakeholders experience, the

more their trust in the process develops and the more relaxed they are with each other. As a result,

stakeholders become more willing and open to examining their own practice and engaging with the

practical wisdom of the other participants.

Time and resources from all involved is also an issue. Effective networking requires regular

structured opportunities for dynamic conversations (Schön 1983), which can be very time

consuming. Balancing the learning to be obtained from engaging in networking with programme

implementation and the needs of the children, families and services we work with can be a dilemma,

particularly when resources are tight.

While there are tangible reputational benefits to NCI from ELI, NCI has to be careful of its effect on

the process and ensure that the opinions of all the stakeholders are included and respected. The

demands from funders and policy makers for programmes to be evidenced-based has to be balanced

with the inherent tensions in a community development project (Taylor 2000). Managing these

conflicting positions is an on-going challenge, particularly as stakeholders applaud ELI's flexible and

non-prescriptive approach to programme design and delivery and see it as key to the programme's

success (Share et al. 2011).

Conclusion

There needs to be more recognition that inequality in education begins at an early age and attempts

to mitigate educational disadvantage must begin even before a child starts school (UNICEF 2002).

Successful change also requires an emergent, evolutionary and educational process of engaging with

others that needs to be sustained for significant periods of time (Herr and Anderson 2005). Through

ELI, NCI and its partners enable children, their families and the community, to acquire the skills and

self-confidence needed to fully benefit from the educational system. As the 'bridge' between the

activities of different interest groups, NCI facilitates stakeholders to create and share knowledge;

learn from each other's experiences and work together to find solutions to common problems.

Harnessing the creativity, enthusiasm and commitment of the community in this way supports all of

NCI's 'third mission' activities and builds capacity within all sectors of the community, including NCI,

for reflection and change

Submission 2.03 National College of Art and Design (NCAD)

NCAD response to National Access Consultation

Education has the power to transform lives, lift people out of poverty and break down cycles of disadvantage. The objective of achieving equity of access to higher education is rooted in principles of equality and social inclusion and has been a longstanding national policy priority in Ireland.

If taken seriously, the national ambition articulated through the statement above, made in

the opening paragraphs of the National Access Plan Consultation Paper, is of vital significance and truly challenging. There is ample evidence of the transformative potential of

education at the level of the individual in Ireland and in countries across the world. There is

also evidence that education has the power to transform societies. What is really difficult is

providing for and delivering equal access to that transformative potential.

Principles of equality and social inclusion are more radical than they sound. This is evident in

the deep challenges encountered thus far in implementing Ireland's longstanding national

policy priority in respect of equal access to Higher Education. A shift in the culture of Higher

Education Institutions is required to deliver against the principle of equality and social inclusion. A shift in culture that requires:

- the development of understanding (sensitivity to and respect for differences in experience and perspective)
- changes in practice toward the Universal Design of Learning, in respect of both methodology and curriculum

- becoming institutions that learn as well as teach, and are capable of sharing authority (open to critique and open to change).

The evidence presented as part of this consultation process suggests that all of this is easy to

say and very hard to enact. A determination to sustain and renew our national commitment

to this policy, as suggested by the consultation, is important. The drive toward a whole of

education approach to widening participation and ensuring that equal access for all in respect of all aspects of learning (mainstreaming) are important and welcome. Ensuring strong provision of individual supports for those who need it (and will continue to need it) is

vital.

Dr Siun Hanrahan

Head of Academic Affairs

On behalf of the National College of Art & Design, Dublin.

NCAD response to National Access Consultation

How should our overall vision for equity of access to higher education in Ireland be for 2022-2026?

- Strong individual supports for those in need.
- Education of, and support for, staff in order to embed equity of access across HEIs.
- Universal Design of Learning (inclusive in respect of methodology and curriculum).
- Investment in inter-institutional collaboration to enhance pre-entry, post-entry and post-exit support.

Who are the target groups that should be specified in the next National Access Plan? How do we ensure that vulnerable members of our society are included (e.g., learners currently in care or who have experience of being in care)?

- Challenges of marginalisation:

Identifying specific target groups is really important, enabling, as it does, accountability in respect of the success of access initiatives. However, It is worth giving consideration to

how the intersection of various economic and social factors may create significant disadvantage and marginalisation, without easy categorisation:

Is it possible to introduce an element of flexibility whereby if someone can evidence their status as marginalised they can access supports?

Additional Target Groups...

- Prisoners, former prisoners, young offenders

- People in care

Ensuring that vulnerable members of our society are included...

- Encouraging and supporting long-term partnerships between Education providers and

target communities and relevant organisations.

- Consideration of HEI governance structures at national level and how marginal perspectives are effectively included within and authorised in giving guidance to HEIs on

becoming culturally inclusive organisations.

- o How might marginalised communities have a voice and role on governing authorities?

- o Capacity building in communities is important but so is capacity building in HEIs so that we become capable of recognising, understanding and changing the structures and assumptions that sustain the privileges of the status quo.

How can pre-entry and post-entry activities be developed?

- Continued financial support for pre-entry out-reach initiatives.

NCAD response to National Access Consultation

- National guidance / Forums:

- o enabling links across 'whole' of education & related provision.

- o sharing of practice/innovations in respect of access and induction initiatives.

o enabling sharing of practice and development of policy/initiatives to enhance supports in respect of mental health. (Is there more that can be done to enable access and successful engagement on the part of individuals for whom mental health is an issue before entering HE?)

● Investment in long-term partnerships with target communities and relevant organisations.

● Investment in Mentorship and ‘modelling’ structures:

o pre-entry, post-entry and post-exit mentoring.

o early / mid-career mentoring opportunities for former access students, perhaps as accredited CPD (under Human Capital Initiative structures).

o Opportunities for mentoring inputs from late-career / pre-retirement professionals to offer advice support.

One of the opportunities that may not be readily available for access students is having a social network that enables professional support post-exit. Building post-exit mentoring opportunities could be of real value as part of what makes investing in higher education feasible for marginalised individuals/families.

● Continued investment in one-to-one learning supports.

● Student advice and support team for both pre-entry and post entry advice and guidance.

● Universal Design of Learning and Teaching:

o national guidance on policies and practice

o CPD - Teaching the Teacher is vital

● Investment in Post-Exit Mentoring:

o As noted above, support in building professional network and practice upon completion of HE could greatly enhance meaningful ‘access’.

o The national Human Capital Initiative could provide a valuable platform and spur to creative thinking in support of the enhancement of post-exit access structures.

How can current funding programmes be better utilised to further the objectives of the National Access Plan?

- Fund research into curricula and teaching and learning in higher education to ensure teaching methods and materials are inclusive and accessible to all.

NCAD response to National Access Consultation

- A less narrow focus in terms of target groups, perhaps better capturing 'intersectionality'

and creating the possibility of giving support to anyone who can evidence their status as marginalised.

- PATH work in developing a diverse teacher cohort is vital - more diverse staff in teaching,

and keeping diversity of staff on the national agenda for HEIs is also vital.

- The Fund for Students with Disabilities needs to take account of smaller colleges who may be disadvantaged by the new funding model. Core learning support and assistive technology support need to be available to each student in need, without disadvantaging

students for attending a small/specialist College.

How can the goal of mainstreaming be further embedded within HEIs?

- Staff CPD, encompassing:

- o diversity training,

- o unconscious bias,

- o neurodivergence and meeting diverse educational needs

- Mentor training (staff/student academic mentoring)

- Support for programmes that explore and support student (and staff) understanding of

diversity (along the lines of the active consent training/workshops being established across HEIs).

- Affordable Accommodation.

- Embedding Universal Design of Learning and continuing to ensure capacity to meet

individual learning needs.

- ‘Whole of system’ investment – enabling engagement with representative organisations.
- National initiative to enable HE student access to software – Adobe Suite, for example.
- Extending Assistive Technology availability (where may be needed in the absence of a diagnosis).
- Continue SATL initiative – with clear signposts to encourage and enable initiatives that support ‘universal’ student success.
- Curricula – guidance and clear expectation that lecturers, module leaders and programme leaders review curricula to ensure inclusivity and resist cultural and ‘privilege’ biases. Curricula that encourage students to identify and challenge orthodoxies.

NCAD response to National Access Consultation

How can a whole-of-education approach to widening participation in higher education be achieved?

- Consideration of HEI governance structures at national level and how marginal perspectives are effectively included within and authorised in giving guidance to HEIs on becoming culturally inclusive organisations.
 - Investment in understanding and creating alternative pathways into HE for people who learn differently.
 - Extend ‘free fees’ support to part-time programmes and students.
 - National Disciplinary Forums to give thought to how a view-forward to career options and imaginable futures can be communicated to young people who might not otherwise see or understand the kinds of options that a given discipline entails.
- How can pathways between further education and training and higher

education be better developed?

- Encourage the development of pre-entry college courses jointly run and staffed by FET

and HEI; PLCs designed to equip students with the skills to succeed in 3rd level.

How can other social inclusion initiatives outside of the higher education sector be harnessed to support equity of access objectives?

- Supports to enable cross-sectoral collaboration so that the expertise of those working

with marginalised groups can be shared with HEIs, and HEIs enabled to respond effectively; inter-agency collaboration fostered and supported.

- Support for working with young teachers as they take up roles in schools to support continued understanding, development and promotion of social inclusion and focus upon:

- o enabling students to see a route into HE, and

- o engaging with HEs to communicate the obstacles as perceived by young people.

- Tackle housing crisis in Dublin!

- Enhance 'transitional' supports for those who have been multiply-disadvantaged through

learning challenges or social disadvantage (the care system).

- Greater investment in HSE and wider disability support - the cost and the time it takes to

get diagnoses means that those without wealth to draw upon are marginalised.

NCAD response to National Access Consultation

What challenges has Covid-19 presented in relation to an inclusive higher education system and how can they be addressed?

- Digital Connectivity - the digital divide is significant and the funding for laptops made a

really important contribution. But CONNECTIVITY is also key. With challenges ranging from available signal/broadband to affording the data required to engage with contemporary HE learning activities. Fund Connectivity!

● Space – this has been a real challenge for many marginalised groups. Meaningful access

for marginalised groups requires:

o Decent, affordable accommodation for students.

o Decent and reasonable accommodation for families that is sufficient to enable quiet work within the home.

● Mental health challenges. Belonging problems increased across the whole of the student

population. Enhanced mental health supports across the whole of Ireland's education system will need to be in place for several years post-COVID, as the impact of the pandemic will take time to address.

● One notable challenge is that, due to Covid, there is a significant backlog of psychoeducational and mental health assessments at a national level. This means that some students starting their HE journey this September will not have received a needed diagnosis. Furthermore, the backlog may take years to work through so that additional provision in respect of enhanced availability of learning supports at HE will be needed for several years.

● Financial difficulties arising from Covid will affect significant numbers of people and provision needs to be made to mitigate this (again, this is likely to persist over a number of years).

● Students with ADHD in particular faced substantial difficulties this year. In addition to enabling the sharing of best practice in terms of supporting specific learning challenges,

ensuring that Learning Support Services are funded across the transition into a post-Covid learning environment will be important