

iScoil Annual Report 2013-2014

Foreword

iScoil was set up to provide an alternative educational opportunity for young early school leavers in response to an identified need for opportunities to achieve accreditation and educational progression outside of mainstream settings. Since 2009 it has worked with over 200 young people referred for a range of reasons. We understand early school leaving as a complex issue often occurring when a range of circumstances combine and we see this reflected in our students each year. What we strive to do is acknowledge that young people who choose to work with us on iScoil are not disengaged from learning but from a system that does not suit their needs at a particular time in their lives.

On iScoil we are very proud of our students who show commitment and tenacity often in the most difficult of circumstances. While we see the current model work we are motivated to develop and improve, to stay current with the fast-changing pace of online learning and the opportunities of access that technology in education is allowing. Our motivation is to grow and resource iScoil so that it can reach even more young people currently isolated or disengaged from educational opportunity and to allow them the access to enhance their life opportunities. The following quote from one of our blended centre partners gives a flavour of the benefit of iScoil from the perspective of professionals working directly with young people:

The young people who avail of this service really enjoy that it is not formal and they can work at their own pace. The importance of iScoil here at the Vault is huge. Without this service some of our young people would not attend any sort of formal education, it has provided an opportunity and support at a crucial time in their lives.

On behalf of the young people whose lives have been changed by the opportunity to continue their education on iScoil, we would like to thank the generosity and vision of the Presentation Congregation who have funded the project to date. We would also like to thank the Board of Directors who voluntarily contributes their time and expertise to further the vision and strategic direction of iScoil as we work towards our ambition to become a national service accessible to young early school leavers across the country.

Michael Doyle

Chair

Marianne Checkley

Chief Executive Officer

1. Our Students

During 2013-14 iScoil worked with a total of 56 young people in a range of settings between September and June. Considering reason for referral iScoil students can be viewed as a diverse group of young people, reinforcing the assertion of early school leaving as a complex issue that occurs often when a range circumstances combine. In September 2013, 24 students returned to the programme after the summer break and a further 32 young people were enrolled during the year. These learners joined the programme after learner inductions took place during September/October and January/February. In total, 34 students achieved certification at FETAC Level 3 with 6 students awarded the full certificate in General Learning. During the year iScoil also facilitated progression routes for a number of young people who felt ready to move on to other educational provisions, progression routes include return to school, Youthreach and SOLAS apprenticeship and education programmes.

2. Learning and Assessment

iScoil works with young people at their own pace in a supportive way by assessing each students needs individually. The students learning experience on iScoils Moodle virtual learning environment (VLE) is individualised and customized to engage each young person at their learning level and to encourage exploration motivated by their own interests. iScoil has developed a range of curricula to meet the needs of a diverse population of learners. Each FETAC module has a core course of resources designed to bring a learner through all learning outcomes required to successfully achieve accreditation in that module. Instructional resources include short pieces of text, videos, animations and some links to external sites. Student portfolios for assessment include evidence of a student's path to achieving learning outcomes for each module as well as evidence pieces that show skills, knowledge and competencies appropriate to the accreditation level. There were two accreditation periods in April and August. This year we added Digital Media to our courses and four students successfully completed the course. The number of students achieving certification in subject modules is outlined below:

3. A Developing Model

We are constantly looking at ways to develop and improve the learning experience for students. For example this year with the support of Dublin City University we trialed Adobe Connect to deliver synchronous Mathematics instruction to a learner based in a blended centre. This provided an excellent opportunity to test a quality web-conferencing platform. As a trial there was pros and cons involved and valuable lessons learned and we're currently writing up a report that will inform how we progress with integrating synchronous instruction into our learning model.

Strategic Consultancy

In 2013 the iScoil Board identified a need for further strategic management and professional development. In January 2014 the Board engaged the professional services of H2 Learning in the person of Michael Hallissy. The focus of the work carried out in partnership with the iScoil team was to:

- build on the relationship with the Department of Education and Skills (DES) with a view to securing funding to ensure the sustainability of iScoil;
- develop our learning model to take account of emerging opportunities with the new Junior Cycle;
- develop and support our team, mentors and subject specialists and
- to maintain the independence and innovation of iScoil.

Significant progress was made in the first half of 2014 that led to furthering the relationship with relevant sections of the DES with a view to a funding partnership. Other work carried out including the development of a strategy to further enhance the learning model looking at good practice in teaching, learning design and the educational experience within an online learning environment.

4. Blended Learning:

The blended centres in Limerick and Longford continued to work successfully and in some cases increased their numbers in response to local needs identified at ground level. In addition new blended centres were established in Kildare, Carlow, Mullingar and Offaly.

These centres are working with a diverse range of young people that require supportive interventions identified by TUSLA and a range of local multi-disciplinary services.

Blended Centre Partnerships during 2013/2014

Longford Regional Youth Service
Moyross Community Development Centre
Kings Island Garda Youth Diversion
Ballinacurra Weston School Completion Prog
Newbridge Youth Development Training Centre
Carlow Regional Youth Service
Tullamore Fusion Project
Mullingar Grange Resource Centre

iScoil offers a flexible learning model to learners and this is evidenced when a centre-based learner moving to a new location requested that he remain engaged in the project as a home based learner. We can accommodate his request and as a result he can remain involved and finish his Level 3 certificate in General Learning. There is also growing interest in the iScoil as a successful intervention for young early school leavers. The Project Manager presented on iScoil for Interagency groups in Tipperary and Northside Dublin where there is potential for partnerships to develop in addressing identified needs at local level.

5. Learning Technology:

This year has seen iScoil employ a range of solutions to meet the needs of our students. In conjunction with DCU a pilot scheme was launched to deliver synchronous online math tutorials to a remote student with positive feedback from both the teacher and student. We have developed our social network presence significantly in the past year. Embracing Facebook and Twitter has encouraged greater student interaction online and developed iScoil's commitment to supporting student socialization online. Cloud services such as Google Apps have been embraced allowing staff to make better educational decisions. This has also resulted in cost savings as we have moved away from dedicated hosted services.

A new database system will soon be incorporated to better track student activity and progression and improve educational outcomes. An in-depth study into eLearning authoring software has been undertaken to identify the best solution to iScoil's learning

resource requirements. The refurbishment of 10 computers led to substantial savings in new student hardware over the year. Refurbishment or replacement of staff computers will be reviewed in the following year.

6. Workshops:

During 2013/2014 iScoil ran a series of five workshops which addressed a specific area of student interest i.e. computer game design, over a longer-term. These workshops offered students an opportunity to meet other students in a small group and in a relaxed, informal setting. This helped to develop student's social skills while also covering specific learning outcomes for FETAC awards in Communications and Personal Effectiveness. The workshops developed skills in Computer Game Design from basic principles and process to the creation of a simple game format guided by input from professionals in the industry.

7. Continued Professional Development:

Team members are the first point of contact with the student, family and referral agencies. They liaise with the mentors after induction and maintain regular contact with the student on the learning platform, by telephone and home visit. Weekly reports from mentors and subject specialists are reviewed by the team where engagement is assessed at the start of each week and feedback provided on each student. Joining the central team this year, Sue Meehan intern, contributed to the review and development of online resources using a range of software applications.

Enhancing the professional knowledge and skills of the team, this year the iScoil Project Manager and Support Technician completed Masters studies, thesis topics explored the potential of online learning as an alternative educational programme for young early school leavers and if social networking, specifically Facebook had any impact on learners engagement. The Project Manager also presented research at following conferences: Computers in Education Society of Ireland (CESI) and Educational Studies Association of Ireland (ESAI).

8. iScoil People

The iScoil Board

Darragh O'Shaughnessy, Chair, AITI Chartered Tax Advisor (CTA)

Nano Brennan, Chair Presentation Ireland

Dr Peter Archer, Director Educational Research Centre

Anne Coffey, Presentations Sisters Leadership Team South West

AnneMarie Quinn, Presentation Sisters Leadership Team, South East

Michael Doyle, former regional manager National Educational Welfare Board

Joan O'Reilly, Presentation Sisters Leadership Team Northern

Dr Yvonne Crotty, School of Education Studies Dublin City University

The iScoil Central Team

David Rose, Chief Executive Officer and Company Secretary

Marianne Checkley, Project Manager

Anne Fitzpatrick Administrator

Joanne Frawley Education Officer, Mentor and Specialist

Jonathan Walsh, Learning and Support Technician

Dr Michael Hallissy, Director of Development

Mentors and Specialists

AnneMaree Barry Social Media and Digital Media

Julie Bancroft Mentor and Communications

Lynda Carroll Mentor

Carmel Cremin Living Things

Oihana Curiel French and Spanish

Joanne Frawley Mentor, Personal & Interpersonal Skills

AnnMarie Keeley Mentor

Karen Kelly Mentor and Career Preparation

Sean Keville Mentor

Marie Loftus Mathematics and Computer Literacy

Eileen Smith Mentor

9. Student Cohort 2013-2014

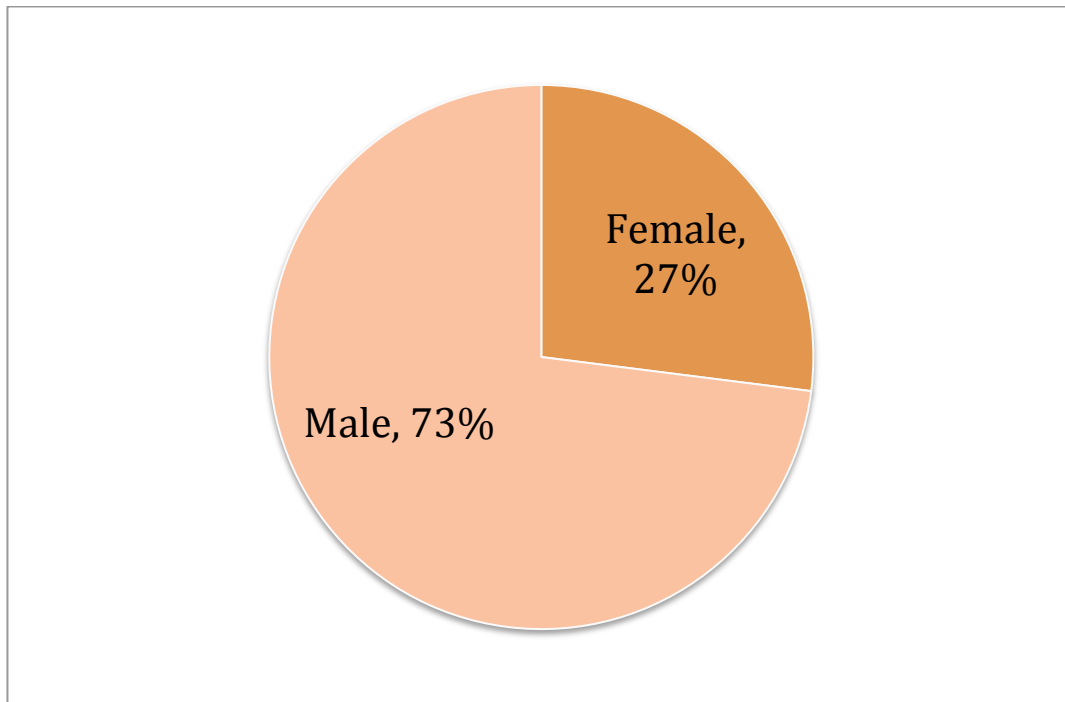


Figure: Total Students by Gender N=56

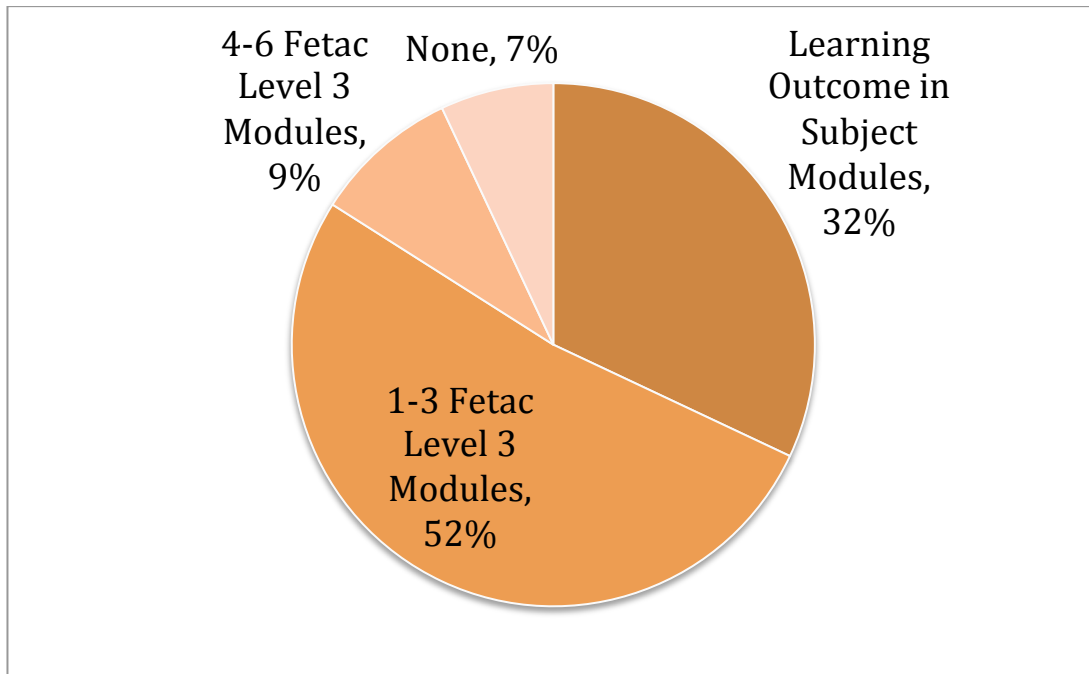


Figure 1: Accreditation Achieved N=56

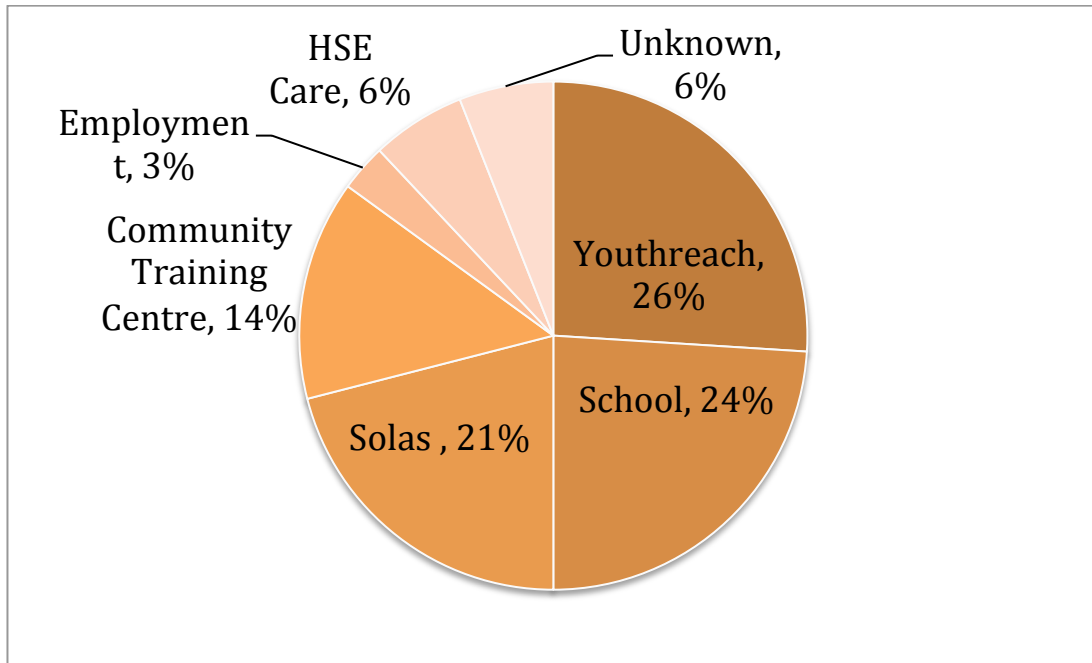


Figure 2: Student Progression Routes N=33