

# iScoil Annual Report 2015

---

## **Introduction**

After a year of change there is a great energy and enthusiasm in the iScoil Team as we look forward to an exciting future of growth and development. Over the last year there has been significant changes as we review the roles on iScoil, the way we work together and implement enhancements to increase access and opportunity for our students to progress. The following provides a brief outline of the work of the last academic year (September 2014-August 2015) where we continue to see the benefit of our student-centred model in engaging young early school leavers in learning, accreditation.

## **1. Our Students**

During 2014-15 iScoil worked with a total of 51 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 of circumstances combine. In September 2014, 20 students returned to the programme after the summer break and a further 31 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, 30 students achieved certification at QQI Level 3 with 14 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. Our blended centres across the country have continued to work successfully and now make up approximately half of our student cohort each year. 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. We have implemented a pilot training programme for support workers in blended centres and we are actively involved in discussions with agencies around the country on queries for an iScoil service.

## **2. An Evolving Model**

The last year has been a year of change for iScoil and has included changes implemented based on a recent review and evaluation of the educational experience on

iScoil from the perspective of all stakeholders, not least our students. We have identified Key Principles underpinning the learning experience and these provide a focus for what we want to achieve and a direction for what requires development. These principles include:

- Relevant and engaging content for students
- Supportive mentoring and teaching roles
- Ongoing constructive and positive feedback
- Communication and collaboration

The following provides a brief outline of the main areas where we have introduced new ways of working designed to enhance our learning model based on the above and maintain iScoil at the forefront of alternatives to mainstream education.

- Restructure of roles

During 2015 iScoil has re-organised the Central Team and recruited a new Education Co-ordinator and Learning Technologist. Both of these appointments revitalized the iScoil Central Team and provided a solid base for a further restructure of the teaching roles. Following a review we have redefined the teaching roles and brought a Lead Mentor and Subject Tutor into the Central Team in the Acorn Centre.

- Review of Teaching and Learning Model

With a more effective structure in place we continued the development work into a review of our teaching and learning practice. Findings from evaluation and consultation with tutors and mentors on iScoil confirmed that a challenge in delivering a flexible, student-centred approach was, for most, a lack of direct face-to-face or synchronous communication and feedback with learners. On the other hand our ability to provide a personalised programme that could meet individual learner needs and interest-led content was seen as a key strength. We put in place the groundwork for new approaches in synchronous learning and project based learning to build on our findings of what works well and what could work better.

- New Database and Reporting System

A new database system was designed and rolled out in advance of students coming online in September 2015. The database is another unique iScoil development that allows us to better track student activity and progression and improve educational outcomes. It is also

designed to provide a transparent hub of information and communication across all roles and therefore supports real collaborative

- Developing Blended Centres

The development builds on the work of the last number of years to ensure we are flexible in working with young people with a range of needs and in a range of contexts. This year we introduced online training for Support Workers in Blended Centres and have started work on a review of best practice in the area of blended learning towards establishing guidelines on how we work in partnership with relevant services and agencies.

### **3. Funding and Sustainability**

iScoil is once again at an exciting time in development. The project has gained considerable knowledge and experience in what works in online learning for young early school leavers. There is now an opportunity to enhance an existing and successful model by building a solid foundation that invests in committed and dynamic professionals. In creating a foundation we can enhance the quality of the educational experience for our learners while confidently approaching additional funders and supporters in the knowledge that we can absorb growth and expansion in a sustainable way.

The continued generosity of the Presentation Sisters has allowed iScoil to provide a last chance for some of our most vulnerable young people to access educational opportunities. Once again when we reached a crisis point in 2014 the Presentation Leadership Teams provided security.

Other developments in Funding include:

- Significant progress was made in 2015 with the Home Tuition Section of the DES that has resulted in a Service Level Agreement for €192,500
- ESB grant for development of €6,000 as part of their philanthropic fund
- NCCA grant of €5,000 for Research and Development
- Ongoing discussion with Department of Justice

A revamp of our website over the summer is a key step towards raising our profile.

We are also in discussion with the Education Training Board to work in partnership on a pilot project with Early School Leavers from January 2016.

We see the future of iScoil not only in terms of financial stability but also in terms of our partnerships, collaboration and how we place ourselves within the educational and social inclusion landscape in Ireland. During 2014-2015 we have presented at conferences in

Ireland and Europe and engaged a range of interested parties in our approach to online and blended learning as a successful model for working with early school leavers. We have also made a positive start to raising our profile with philanthropic and Corporate Social Responsibility as we believe the responsibility for meeting the needs of some of our most vulnerable young people should be spread across government departments, state agencies, business and industry.

## **iScoil People**

iScoil is an online learning programme but we would be nothing without the people behind the service.

### **The iScoil Board (as of August 2015)**

Michael Doyle, Chairperson former regional manager National Educational Welfare Board

Dr Peter Archer, Director Educational Research Centre

Dr Yvonne Crotty, School of Education Studies Dublin City University

Sr Grace McKernan Presentation Sisters South West Province

Sr Joan O'Reilly, Presentation Sisters Leadership Team North East Province

Sr AnneMarie Quinn, Presentation Sisters Leadership Team, North East Province

### **The iScoil Central Team**

Marianne Checkley, CEO and Company Secretary

Anne Fitzpatrick, Administrator

Brian Fitzsimons, Education Co-ordinator

Dr Michael Hallissy, Strategic Development

Stephen Leonard, Learning Technologist

Leanne Young, Lead Mentor and Tutor Careers and Personal Effectiveness

### **Mentors and Specialists**

AnneMaree Barry      Tutor Digital Media

Julie Bancroft      Tutor Communications

Joanne Frawley      Mentor and Tutor Personal & Interpersonal Skills

Karen Kelly      Mentor

Sean Keville      Mentor

Marie Loftus      Tutor Mathematics and Computer Literacy

## Students 2014-2015

<b>Total Number of Students:</b>	51	
<b>Gender:</b>	Male 44	Female 7
<b>Location:</b>	At-Home 29	Blended Centre 22
<b>Reason for Referral:</b>	Anxiety	22
	Behavioural	20
	Aspergers	2
	Medical	2
	Learning Difficulties/Other	4
<b>Accreditation:</b>	QQI Level 3 Major Award	14
	QQI Level 3 Component	16
	Module Learning Outcomes	18
	No Learning Outcomes	3
<b>Progression Routes:</b>	Back to School	5
	Employment	1
	Solas	5
	Youthreach	8
	Unkown/TBC	5

## Blended Centres 2014-2015

Ballinacurra Weston, Limerick School Completion Programme  
Kings Island, Limerick Garda Youth Diversion Programme  
Moyross, Limerick Community & Youth Development Project  
Southill, Limerick Regional Youth Service  
Longford Town, Regional Youth Service  
Newbridge, Kildare Solas Youth Training Project  
Tullamore, Offaly Fusion: Garda Youth Diversion Programme  
Carlow Town, Regional Youth Service  
Ballinrobe, Mayo Family Resource Centre  
Bray, Wicklow School Completion Programme