

Annual Report 2015/2016

Introduction

iScoil has grown into a service with a reputation for quality and is now attracting state funding and interest as a model of learning from other European countries. After a breakthrough year in 2014/2015 with regard to funding from the Department of Education and Skills we are now in a strong position to build and grow. The support of our Funders, the commitment of our Board of Directors and the energy of our team of dedicated professionals continue to bring us closer to our goal of providing an inclusive solution that opens access to the opportunity to learn, achieve and progress for all young people.

Last year we presented two themes that comprise a dual strand approach to strategic and operational planning for 2016-2019:

Theme 1: Enhancing the Educational Model

Theme 2: Investment and Sustainability

The plan was finalised and has informed our focus in designing new approaches to improve the iScoil learning model and in our work towards future growth and sustainability. We have developed complementing Implementation and Operational Plans that map the work plan across both themes in order to provide us with clear measurable targets in reaching our aims and objectives.

At the centre of our work is our students. We are very proud of the young people who engage with iScoil as they show resilience and determination often through difficult and challenging circumstance. Wanting to learn but finding themselves outside of a mainstream educational system, our students continue their educational journeys by accessing iScoil from home or from a local community or youth centre. Our motivation is to grow and resource iScoil so that it can reach even more young people currently isolated or disengaged from education. We want to allow them the opportunity to enhance their life opportunities and contribute actively and positively to their communities and to the future growth of our society.

Below outlines highlights in work carried out during the year towards progressing our aims and includes significant milestones in developing the iScoil model of learning and embedding the model within the educational landscape in Ireland.

Marianne Checkley
CEO

Our Impact

During 2015-16 iScoil worked with a total of 56 young people in a range of settings between September and June. We are constantly building our partnership approach to supporting young people to fulfil their potential, connect socially and benefit from personal development programmes and fun activities. In terms of accreditation we had a record year with a total of 159 QQI Level 3 modules awarded. Our strong emphasis on connecting our students with continuing education and learning pathways continues and 38 iScoil students progressed to school, further education, or employment. 18 students requested the opportunity to return to iScoil in September 2016.

See Appendix 1 for further details

Enhancing the iScoil Design for Learning

Throughout the year we implemented developments to our evolving model of learning and the success of our students is as a result of this process and of the collaboration between the Central Team and online Tutors and Mentors.

Communication and Collaboration

On iScoil all roles work together to support students achieve and progress. As an online community this involves an increased awareness of the need to communicate with each other in a clear and transparent manner. We can have phone calls, email, message or even shout across the room if we're office based, but as we are a team whose primary workspace is online we need to maintain a clear flow of information around what's happening with students in order to be effective. We have developed processes that reinforce key areas where all roles take responsibility:

- Information Sharing
- Monitoring Student Engagement
- Learner Feedback

Synchronous Learning

A gap in our current model highlighted the opportunity to enhance our practice further by including live or synchronous learning sessions. With a funding grant from ESB Energy Ireland the iScoil team increased individual support to students and provided an increased level of online support by:

1. Piloting synchronous lessons using video conferencing software.
2. Developed a template and framework for delivery of future synchronous tutorials.
3. Used the learning from the pilot tutorials to develop good practice guidelines in 'live' sessions with.

This is a new area where we see many exciting opportunities to improve the social presence and sense of community for students.

Spotlight: Project Based Learning

Our strategy in designing content encourages tutors and mentors to adapt activities to the interest of learners and this in turn has developed into interest-led theme based courses in some courses e.g. Personal Effectiveness. Building on this with a funding grant from the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) we developed and delivered a blended approach to Project Based Learning. This involved:

- Designing online courses that combined personal learning with group work.
- Creating assessment rubrics to capture student progress in a Key Skills
- Exploring the use of technology in building multi-modal online portfolios for assessment.

Staff Handbook and Training

As some key developments and reviews have taken place over the last two years there was a need to review our procedural documents to ensure our standards of process continued to match our standards of practice and supported clear direction and guidelines for all staff working on iScoil.

- Updated and revised Staff Handbook for online Mentor and Tutor roles on iScoil
- A new online training course for support workers in Blended Centres
- A new online training and induction course for online Mentors

Sustainability and Growth

Our desired social impact is to widen access to education for all and increase engagement in learning. We are identifying statutory funding streams and Departmental responsibility in a joined-up approach to ensuring every young person who needs an alternative to mainstream education has the opportunity to access iScoil.

Funding

Department of Education and Skills

iScoil had a breakthrough year last year by securing funding from the Department of Education. Dialogue and reporting continued with officials of the Special Education Section ETB and we have secured further funding for the academic year 2016/2017 of €192,500.

Presentation Sisters

Presentation Sisters have continued their support for iScoil with a further €100,000 grant during 2016. The aim is to reduce the financial commitment from the Congregation and a presentation was made to the Leadership Teams in April 2016 on strategic planning to meet this aim. Members of the iScoil team also presented at a Congregational Gathering in March 2016 to inform on the impact of the work of iScoil on the lives of young people.

Philanthropic and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

Following a submission to the JP McManus Philanthropic fund to provide grant funding to our Limerick based blended learning centres we received €20,000 for 2016/2017. Salesforce Corporation donated pro bono staff time to support developments to our database

Spotlight: Partnership with Dublin Dun Laoghaire Education Training Board

In January 2016 DDLETB provided a grant of €48,000 to fund a pilot initiative with iScoil to provide online and blended learning opportunities to students attending their Alternative Learning Programme (ALP) centres. The aim of the pilot was to build on the current iScoil blended learning model and designed to test the potential for growth and scale of iScoil as a learning service to organisations working with marginalized young people. The pilot was rolled out to 6 ALP centres, 4 in Dublin and 2 in Tipperary with a total of fifteen young people aged between 13-16 years referred for a range of reasons impacting on their ability to attend or engage effectively in school including anxiety, emotional behavior disorder, school refusal, family and home circumstance.

Outcomes

Outcomes were impressive with 10 young people achieving one or two QQI Level 3 components and the majority achieving two. Another four young people successfully engaged online at their own pace achieving learning outcomes while contributing to group work activities. Projects completed ranged from cooking a three-course meal for invited community guests to an art project designing signage for the local youth centre. One young person disengaged from the programme.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The pilot partnership between ALP and iScoil clearly worked successfully to ensure that marginalized young people remain in education. All involved strongly advocated for a continued roll-out that would expand access and meet the evident need for creative and innovative alternatives to mainstream education. Ultimately the partnership was seen as an opportunity to drive positive outcomes for young people and communities through multi-disciplinary and inter-agency collaboration.

Spotlight: Social Innovation Fund Ireland THINKTECH Programme

iScoil was selected as one of 11 finalists in THINKTECH, a €1 million project to grow ideas for a better Ireland. The award provides access to a fund of up to €750,000 in grants as well as support and mentoring to further develop innovations. The final stage involved an interview, presentation of a proposal for development, a workshop and site visit.

Director of Google.org, Jacqueline Fuller said: *“These ideas are becoming a reality and addressing a wide range of social issues. For example they include a social network that is helping to combat cyberbullying, and projects that are providing new ways to access education for early school leavers and marginalised communities, as well as ways that technology can help to reduce the isolation of older people in Irish communities. We see great potential for these ideas to make a lasting impact and they also demonstrate Google’s view that technology has the power to make a real difference and create positive change in society.”*

The final winners will be announced on the 7th December.

Department of Justice

iScoil was included in a recent report from Irish Youth Justice Service on priority areas for Garda Youth Diversion Programmes currently co-funded under the European Social Fund

2014-2020 Human Capital Investment Programme (now Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning PEIL).

Priority Areas Section B: Promotion of equal opportunities and non-discrimination

“Youth justice workers will work locally to improve educational and employment outcomes for young people. This can include liaising with schools, providing assistance with homework, providing tutor hours, supporting young people with alternative paths to education e.g. iScoil or help in accessing programmes such as Youthreach if needed. If an issue with education arises in relation to one of the 9 discriminatory grounds, e.g. membership of the Travelling Community or Disability, then the Youth Justice Worker will work to provide support to the young person so that the issues can be dealt with.”

Collaboration and Connection

Our inter-disciplinary approach extends from ‘on the ground’ collaboration with partnership agencies and services to connecting on a more strategic level for sharing of good practice and identifying potential areas for future innovation. This year we have connected with a range of agencies and services working with young people including Foroige, Reachout and Young Social Innovators

Thought Leadership

We want to contribute to innovative developments in educational research and have presented at conferences including Educational Studies Association of Ireland (ESAI), Computers in Education Society of Ireland (CESI) and Learning Tech Labs. We have also connected with research institutions in the US.

European Partners

Connections made by CEO at Online Educa Berlin resulted in iScoil as a partner organisation in two submissions to Erasmus+ funding call. Following feedback on the application process further submissions will be made in Spring 2017.

Nano-Nagle Place

Following meetings with management at South Presentation Nano Nagle Place we are exploring a blended learning service in South Presentation. TUSLA and Cork ETB are involved in the process.

In-School Intervention

A pilot programme ran with a student from Warrenmount Secondary School who was identified as at-risk of disengaging from school due to mental health reasons. The student was enrolled in an iScoil Personal and Interpersonal Skills course for 6 weeks, engaged successfully while in school and also from home and achieved QQI accreditation. The student returned to school in September 2016.

Appendix 1 iScoil People

The iScoil Board

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

Dr Dympna Glendenning, Retired Senior Counsel and Educationalist

Dr Michael Hallissy, CEO/Founder H2 Learning

Jim McVeigh, Dublin and Dun Laoghaire Education Training Board

John O’Riordan, Retired School Principal and Certified Accountant

Sr Joan O’Reilly, Presentation Sisters

Sr AnneMarie Quinn, Presentation Sisters

The iScoil Central Team

Marianne Checkley, CEO and Company Secretary

Anne Fitzpatrick, Administrator

Brian Fitzsimons, Education Co-ordinator

Stephen Leonard, Learning Technologist

Leanne Young, Lead Mentor and Tutor Careers and Personal Effectiveness

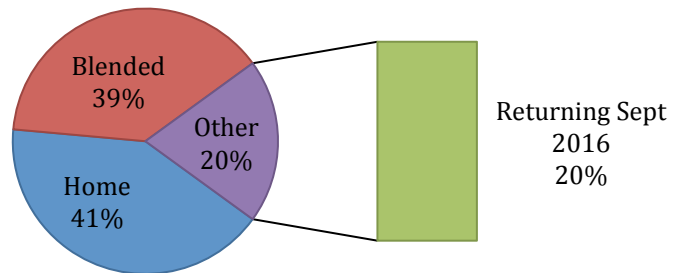
Mentors and Specialists

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
Linda Sullivan	Mentor

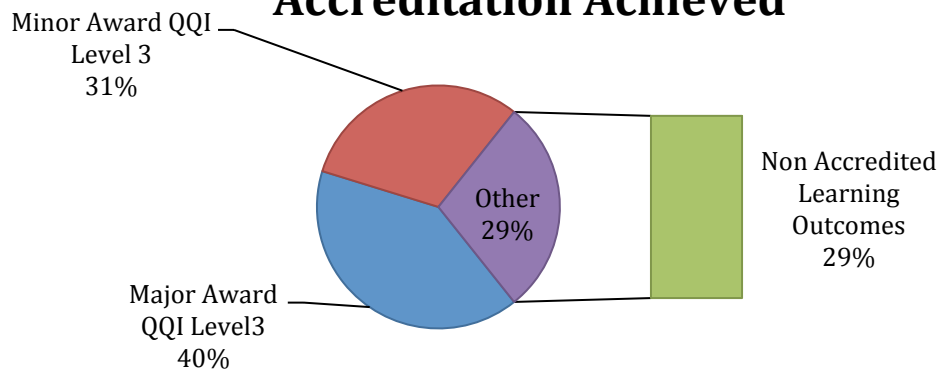
Appendix 2

iScoil Students 2015/2016

Total Students



Accreditation Achieved



Student Progression

