Identifying Innovative Models for Supporting Vulnerable Learners achieve Educational Progression; Early findings from an Evaluation of

Social Innovation Fund Ireland's Education Fund

REPORT 1 OF 3

Authors
Dr Tanja Kovačič, Dr Cormac Forkan, Dr Pat Dolan,
Dr John Canavan, Dr Eamonn Furey, Dr Aileen Shaw,
and Mr Brendan Dolan

UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, NUI Galway
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About the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre

The UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre (UCFRC) is part of the Institute for Lifecourse and Society at the National University of Ireland Galway. It was founded in 2007, through support from The Atlantic Philanthropies, Ireland and the Health Service Executive (HSE), with a base in the School of Political Science and Sociology. The mission of the Centre is to help create the conditions for excellent policies, services, and practices that improve the lives of children, youth, and families through research, education, and service development. The UCFRC has an extensive network of relationships and research collaborations internationally and is widely recognised for its core expertise in the areas of Family Support and Youth Development.

Contact Details:

UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre,
Institute for Lifecourse and Society,
Upper Newcastle Road,
National University of Ireland,
Galway, Ireland.

T: +353 91 495398
E: cfrc@nuigalway.ie
W: www.nuigalway.ie/childandfamilyresearch
Twitter: @UNESCO_CFRC
Facebook: ucfrc.nuig

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List of Abbreviations

CPA THE COMBAT POVERTY AGENCY

DEIS DELIVERING EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY IN SCHOOLS

DES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS

EAPN THE EUROPEAN AUTO-POVERTY NETWORK

ESL EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING

EWB EDUCATIONAL WELFARE BOARD

HSCL HOME SCHOOL COMMUNITY LIAISON

INTO THE IRISH NATIONAL TEACHERS' ORGANISATION

NEET NOT IN EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION OR TRAINING

NUIG NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND, GALWAY

OECD ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC COOPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT

PETE PREPARATION FOR EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMME

PISA	PROGRAMME FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ASSESSMENT
SAS	SPECIAL ASSISTANCE SCHOOLS
SCP	SCHOOL COMPLETION PROGRAMME
SIFI	SOCIAL INNOVATION FUND IRELAND
SPEEDPAK	SPEEDPAK ENHANCED TRAINEESHIP
SQA	SCOTTISH QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY
SSP	SCHOOL SUPPORT PROGRAMME
TCPID	TRINITY CENTRE FOR PEOPLE WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES
UCFRC	UNESCO CHILD AND FAMILY RESEARCH CENTRE
UK	THE UNITED KINGDOM
UNICEF	THE UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S FUND
USA	THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

01

Introduction

This document is the first of three reports (2019, 2020, and 2021) from a major study being conducted by the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre (UCFRC), NUI Galway, on Social Innovation Fund Ireland's Education Fund. Social Innovation Fund Ireland (SIFI) was established by the government in 2015 to stimulate philanthropy and fill a gap in funding innovation for the non-profit sector. Its mission is to provide growth capital and supports to the best social innovations in Ireland, enabling them to scale and maximise their impact.

Recognising the persistence of educational inequality and disadvantage in Irish society, SIFI introduced the Education Fund in late 2017 as a way to confront this extremely complex issue. The Fund was open to projects focused on improving educational outcomes for those experiencing educational disadvantage, and which specifically supported learners to progress from levels 3–6 on the National Framework of Qualifications. Following a rigorous selection process, 10 projects were chosen as recipients of the Award (see Table 1.1 below). Eight are based in Dublin and two in Cork. Each offers a form of alternative education when compared to the mainstream system.

Table 1.1: Details of the 10 projects funded under SIFI's Education Fund

PROJECT	ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE BASE	DESCRIPTION
Trinity Access 21	Dublin	• Trinity Access 21 (TA21) aims to transform the Irish education system and aspires to an education system that supports every young person in reaching their full academic potential. • Trinity Access 21 provides Deis schools with student and teacher training. Students are provided with one-to-one mentoring, group work, and team-based workshops. • The project works in a partnership with schools, communities, other education organisations, and businesses.
Speedpak Enhanced Skills Traineeship (Speedpak)	Dublin	• Speedpak Group's vision is to provide industry work experience and training opportunities to people who are Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET), transforming their lives through employment and greater job resilience. • It combines formal accredited training and work experience where the participant develops the job-seeking, work, and industry skills required to progress to employment. • This traineeship programme is delivered in a collaboration between the State, industry, community, and philanthropy.
iScoil	Dublin	• iScoil provides innovative and flexible, online and blended learning for early school leavers. This model provides a safe environment where young people can reengage with education and access further education, training or employment opportunities. • One-to-one and online modalities of intervention are provided to each student based on their needs, interests, and abilities. • iScoil works in partnership with local agencies and youth services nationally.
Cork Life Centre	Cork	• The Cork Life Centre's vision is to provide a unique and alternative environment for education for children and young people who have disengaged or are at risk of disengaging from mainstream education. • It provides an alternative, one-to-one and small group learning environment with wraparound service. • The Centre established links with numerous agencies and services in Cork City across the areas of business, academia, and health, and with local community groups.

Table 1.1: Details of the 10 projects funded under SIFI's Education Fund (continued)

PROJECT	ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE BASE	DESCRIPTION
Churchfield Community Trust	Cork	• Churchfield Community Trust provides second chance at education and work experience at social enterprises for young people who have experienced alcohol and substance misuse. • It provides one-to-one counselling and group work interventions to participants. • The project works with a range of agencies, services, local authorities and academic institutions.
Trinity Centre for People with Intellectual Disabilities (TCPID)	Dublin	• TCPID's mission is to enable people with an intellectual disability to develop their potential through a combination of lifelong learning and professional training. • The Centre provides learners with a high-quality higher-education programme, mentoring, work experience, and career guidance. • Key partners of the programme come from business, including companies and banks (e.g., Abbott, CPL, and Bank of Ireland).
Preparation for Education, Training and Employment (PETE)	Dublin	• PETE provides educational opportunities and support from those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. • The service provides participants with one-to-one support to build the confidence and skills to overcome personal challenges and participation in mainstream training. • PETE cooperates with numerous agencies and services across the areas of training and education, employment, 'flanking', and housing.
An Cosán VCC	Dublin	• An Cosán VCC seeks to empower women and men from disadvantaged communities across Ireland. • It provides an entry model of higher education and blended learning, face-to-face workshops, technology workshops, live virtual classes, offline individual and group work, collaborative peer learning, and communities of practice. • The programme partners with a wide range of community education organisations at local, regional, and national level.
Aspire 2	Dublin	• Aspire 2 aims to increase Deis school students' prospects of completing the Leaving Cert and progressing to third-level education and apprenticeships. • The project provides students with group mentoring and work experience placement. • The programme established a collaborative partnership with several academic institutions around Ireland (i.e. UCD, CIT, UCC, TCD, and IT Tallaght).
Fast Track Academy	Dublin	• Fast Track Academy's vision is focused on improving communities through youth education by using a whole-person approach. • The project focuses on developing social, behavioural and academic skills and conditions necessary to increase the number of young people transitioning to higher-level education. • It collaborates with IT Tallaght and other agencies in the community.

During the summer of 2017, SIFI made a public call for an 'expression of interest' from parties interested in doing a three-year evaluation of the Education Fund. Following a submission and follow-up interview, a team of researchers from the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre at NUI Galway was appointed as evaluators in the late summer.

Over the three years of this study, the evaluation will investigate the extent to which practices and process utilised by Awardees can serve as models of excellence in overcoming inequality in education. Using a robust research and evaluation methodology, the evaluators will address this by specifically identifying the 'gold standard' from among the 10 projects. This will mean identifying which projects best support their students to progress from QQI levels 3–6 and which projects have a proven potential worth scaling.

This report details the work conducted by the evaluators during year 1 of the Education Fund (December 2017 to December 2018). The information presented in this report is largely contextual, setting the scene for the evaluation of the Education Fund to come. Nevertheless, it does provide some early evaluation data, with the depth and range of data continuing to grow over the next two years of the research.

The report which has been commissioned by SIFI is designed to be read by anyone interested in finding an innovative solution to educational inequality in Ireland. This includes professionals involved in direct educational provision, social innovators, researchers, policymakers, parents, and the general public. For a speed read, this report is also accompanied by a separate, shorter *Executive Summary* (for more see: http://www.childandfamilyresearch.ie/cfrc/publications/policyreports/).

Before progressing to the reminder of this report, we offer a summary of the key learning and findings which have emerged from the application of the evaluation framework over the last year. Figure 1.1 summarises this learning gleaned from the awardees, the projects and activities delivered by the projects. More details on each of these is presented in the forthcoming sections which comprise the remainder of this report.

Figure 1.1 A summary of the key findings so far

Identifying the Collaborative Evaluation Framework

- A collaborative approach to design the evaluation framework with the Awardees and SIFI was used from the start.
- Taking time to observe, listen, and consult on the various possibilities proved to be very beneficial.
- A fit-for-purpose evaluation framework emerged and is being used to identify 'Gold standard' projects, which SIFI are interesting in further supporting to replicate and scale.
- To establish this 'Gold Standard', a number of metrics and methodologies will be used to address these core questions:

  How long does it work?
  For whom does it work?
  In what settings does it work?
  It works compared with what?
  Why does it work?

5 Key messages from the participants' vignettes

The common messages identified by sample of participants from across the 10 projects were that they valued these Projects because:

- Projects provided alternative ways of learning;
- Mentorship is key in Projects;
- Projects focus on personal development skills;
- The importance of caring and supportive relationships with staff and other participants was central;
- Projects work as sanctuaries.

Project Models

- 10 project models based on a common template were written up.
- Project models include information on the names of Awardees, their projects' visions and missions, evidence of the need for the projects and project summary.
- This activity helped recognising similarities and differences among the projects - further developed through the projects clustering process.

Project Clusters

- Similarities and differences documented through the write-up of project models helped identifying three main clusters of projects. These clusters will be used to create sub-sets of learning from among the projects and develop communities of practice.
  1) Life-long learning and social inclusion (PETE, TCPID, Speedpak, An Cosán VCC)
  2) Curriculum reform and diverse pathways to adulthood (Trinity Access 21, Fast Track Academy and Aspire 2)
  3) Alternative education based outside the mainstream schools (Cork Life Centre and iScoil).

Soft-skills questionnaire

- A majority of participants (more than 90%) reported that projects helped them to improve their: self-confidence, become a well-balanced person, acquire new skills, as well as them enjoying attending their respective SIFI project.
- Two thirds of participants had normal levels of self-esteem.
- Respondents experienced lower than normal levels of well-being related to accomplishments and of resilience in terms of peer support and psychological caregiving.
- Respondents reported higher levels of well-being in terms of engagement and relationships and higher resilience levels than the norm in relation to education and personal skills.

The remainder of this report consists of the following sections:

Section 2 Designing an Evaluating Framework to Establish the 'Gold Standard' explains how the evaluators developed an evaluation framework, in collaboration with SIFI and the Awardees, to establish the 'gold standard' from among the 10 Education Fund projects.

Section 3: Implementing the Evaluation Framework – Some Early Data and Findings presents early data and findings focusing on participant vignettes, profiles of the 10 projects, information on project clustering, and the process of measuring 'soft skills' of the participants.

Section 4: Formal and Alternative Education – A Contextual Overview provides a context for the need for the Education Fund, with a critique of the formal education system in Ireland from Independence to now. It contextualises the nature of alternative educational provision from other jurisdictions, given the alternative nature of the 10 projects funded by the Education Fund.

Section 5: Social Innovation and Societal Change introduces Social Innovation Fund Ireland and explores, more broadly, the concept of social innovation, its defining characteristics and its link to educational reform.

Section 6 focuses on the **Key Learning from year 1 and the next steps with the evaluation.**

02

ESTABLISHING THE 'GOLD STANDARD' AMONG THE EDUCATION FUND AWARDEES

2.1 Introduction

The overarching aim of this evaluation is *'to investigate the extent to which practices and process utilised by Awardees can serve as models of excellence in overcoming inequality in education'*. To address this aim, SIFI set out the following set of objectives, which are designed:

1. To provide Awardees with the data necessary for the appraisal of their organisation or programme

2. To trace the benefit of Awardee projects on their students and their progression towards QQI levels 3–6 or in relation to other project objectives in overcoming educational disadvantage

3. To identify successful models for scale or replication

4. To suggest policy changes that might be desirable to overcome educational disadvantages.

This section explains the evaluation framework, developed by the evaluators in collaboration with SIFI and the Awardees, to allow the evaluators begin to establish the 'gold standard' from among the 10 Education Fund projects.

2.2 Developing a Framework to Evaluate the Education Fund

In the expression of interest, as evaluators, we suggested that if our bid was successful, we would spend much of the first year getting to know the work undertaken by the 10 Awardees. This would allow us to develop a fit-for-purpose evaluation framework. Therefore, after an initial 'get to know you' workshop with the Awardees in November 2017, we developed and presented a draft evaluation framework at our next meeting with them in February 2018. After incorporating some specific suggestions received from Awardees, we signed off on the draft framework at the next meeting, in May 2018. While it took six months to develop and achieve consensus on the final evaluation framework, the process enabled us to get to know the Awardees, gain their trust, and listen and respond to their queries about the evaluation.

Underpinning the design of the evaluation framework is the need to identify the projects most successful in supporting their participants to progress from QQI levels 3–6. This 'gold standard', evidence-based information will aid SIFI's overarching aim of supporting the replication and scaling of the best projects from among the Education Funds. Evidence-based knowledge is 'the competent and high-fidelity implementation of practices that have been demonstrated safe and effective' (Chaffin and Friedrich, 2004: 1098).

As shown in Table 2.1, the evaluation framework contains a number of metrics and their associated research methodology, specifically designed to address a set of core questions about the success of the projects. These questions are: *What works? How well does it work? How long does it work? For whom does it work? In what settings does it work? It works compared with what? Why does it work?*

The chosen methodology ranges from tracking the numbers of participants progressing (or not) to QQI levels 3–6 across each project, to exploring participants' experiences with the projects, measuring the increase or decrease in participants' soft skills, and applying a social-return-on-investment framework 'for measuring, managing and accounting for social value' (Social Value UK, no date).

Table 2.1: Framework developed to evaluate the Education Fund

KEY QUESTION	METRICS	AGREED METHODOLOGY	WITH WHOM?
1. What works?	a. Track the number of participants progressing towards QQ1 levels 3–6 in all projects	Tracking system to capture numbers of students completing and dropping out by project	Project participants
2. How well does it work?	a. Measure the increase/decrease in the levels of participants' soft skills	Standardised quantitative pre-, post- and follow-up data collection	Project participants
	b. Understand the lived experiences of a sample of participants	Real-time data collection	Project participants
	c. Apply a social-return-on-investment approach to determine which outcomes are most valued by participants	SROI framework	Projects and their participants
3. How long does it work?	a. Follow up with participants six months after they finish with the projects	Tracking system	Project participants
4. For whom does it work?	a. Investigate what patterns emerge based on socio-demographic participant data (age, gender, location, age, etc.)	Statistical tracking	Desk-based analysis
5. In what settings does it work?	a. Cluster the 10 projects to identify combined areas of learning	Clustering	Projects and their participants
	b. Formal write-up of the projects models, incorporating the theory of change for each project	One-to-one meetings with projects	Projects
	c. Developmental evaluation meetings with Projects – facilitate data-based assessments and decision-making in the unfolding and developmental processes of innovation	One-to-one meetings with projects	Projects

Table 2.1: Framework developed to evaluate the Education Fund (continued)

KEY QUESTION	METRICS	AGREED METHODOLOGY	WITH WHOM?
6. It works compared with what?	a. Undertake a comprehensive review of the theoretical, policy, and legislative basis for education inequality in Ireland and internationally	Literature, policy and legislative review	Desk-based analysis and key informant interviews
	b. Undertake a review of the role of social innovation in systems change	Literature review	Desk-based analysis
	c. Collect data from internal and external stakeholders on their perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of each project	Qualitative data collection	Internal and external stakeholders associated with each project
7. Why does it work?	a. A summative discussion using the data gathered from steps 1–6 above	Review of evidence to identify the gold standard	Desk-based analysis

A phased approach has been taken in applying for research ethical approval at NUI Galway. Discrete ethics applications will be submitted to cover the implementation of specific elements of the evaluation framework, which are occurring at the same time. Ethical approval for the first part of the work was received from NUI Galway in late summer 2018.

2.3 Conclusion

This section aimed to explain how a framework was developed to evaluate the Education Fund and to outline the key metrics, research methodology, and questions built into the framework. The next section presents some early data and findings gathered during the first year of the evaluation, which are used to begin addressing some of the questions from the evaluation framework outlined in Table 2.1.

03

IMPLEMENTING THE EVALUATION FRAMEWORK — SOME EARLY DATA AND FINDINGS

3.1 Introduction

After the evaluation framework was finalised and the ethical approval was received in late summer 2018, the evaluators were in a position to begin implementing specific elements of the framework in preparation for this end of Year 1 report. The evaluators opted to implement four elements of the framework, deemed to be the most necessary and basic building blocks upon which the rest of the framework could be implemented over time. The early data and findings pertaining to these four elements are contained in this section, namely:

Section 3.2 begins to address Question 6 from Table 2.1 above: *It works compared with what?* It does this by presenting 10 vignettes gathered from participants across the respective projects to generate insights into alternative learning and benefits of projects for them. A set of common messages emanating from this data are presented at the end of this section.

Section 3.3 addresses Question 5b from Table 2.1: *In what settings does it work?* It does this by providing profiles on each of the 10 projects, including a detailed description of their aims, objectives, and methods of working.

Section 3.4 addresses Question 5a from Table 2.1: *In what settings does it work?* It does this by explaining the process used to identify clusters into which the 10 projects could be subdivided.

Finally, **Section 3.5** addresses Question 2a from Table 2.1: *How well does it work?* It discusses the design and implementation of a quantitative study with participants, to measure the nature and extent of their 'soft skills', and presents the first round of findings from the data gathered from October to December 2018.

3.2 'Hearing their Stories' – Participant Vignettes

3.2.1 Introduction

From the outset, placing participants' voices at the centre of our work has been a core objective of this evaluation. Therefore, to get a flavour of the lives and experiences of education of participants across the 10 projects, the evaluators met with and talked to a small sample of them. This section presents participants' narratives in the form of vignettes, which are short, evocative stories, providing an insight into their lives (Hughes, 1998; Reay et al., 2019: 9). The data was gathered from semi-structured interviews with 10 participants (one participant per project), and thematic content analysis was performed. The interviews were transcribed, re-read, and coded. Key emerging themes were recognised in the data, including depiction of participants' respective programme, their experiences with mainstream schooling (if applicable), and wider depiction of the social ecologies in which the projects are set (relationships with other participants, staff and wider community, benefits and opportunities to which the projects exposed participants). Providing evidence and examples for the emerging themes, vignettes were produced to illustrate these themes in a narrative form (Erickson, 1986). Following the 10 stories, a distillation of the common messages emerging from the data is presented. A constant comparison of the stories was used to recognise common themes emerging from the data. As shown in Table 2.1, as the evaluation develops, the evaluators will collect much more data from considerably more participants. Nevertheless, the data presented here is a useful starting point in getting to know the lives and experiences of participants.

Thematic analysis of the vignettes showed that there were five key messages emerging from the data, namely:

Figure 3.1: Five key messages from participants' vignettes

Alternative Ways of Learning
- Participants are exposed to different ways of learning and knowing;
- Participants/students – led and self-directed approach to learning: the programmes focus on participants' needs and interests.

Mentorship is Key
- Mentors guide and support participants in their personal, academic, or work related issues;
- One-to-one relationships with mentors make participants feel that they are important as people.

Focus on Personal Development Skills
- Participants report about a development of personal (i.e. confidence and self-esteem), social, communication and life skills;
- They learn how to become independent and how to make healthy life choice.

Caring and Supportive Relationships with Staff and other Participants
- The relationships with staff, tutors and mentors are less hierarchical and more supportive;
- Participants often share their life experiences with each other and talk about mutual care, trust and bonding.

Projects as Sanctuaries
- The projects operate in less structured, informal and flexible settings;
- The atmosphere is described as safe, calm and non-judgmental.

It is our view that these stories speak for themselves, and that placing participants' voices centrally in this report serves as a clear reminder of the adversities they have all faced to date, and the need to find a better way for future generations.

3.2.2 Participant Vignettes

Project 1: Trinity Access 21

'Trinity Access 21 makes you feel comfortable about making life choices when you leave secondary school.'

Anna is a final-year student in an all-girls secondary school based in Dublin. She likes her school, as she met a lot of friends here. She finds teachers very understanding and trustworthy. They provide support and advice on matters not just related to school. In the second year, Anna got introduced to Trinity Access 21. Trinity College Dublin began testing different programmes in various secondary schools to make young people comfortable about making life choices after leaving secondary school. Initially, staff members approached students with a leadership project in mind. Anna and her classmates were supposed to do a project of their choice, and they decided to refurbish an unused classroom in their school. Teachers provided advice and helped them with the logistics, but the ideas and the planning were led by the students. This process helped them to learn how to work both independently and as part of a team.

Mentoring programme was another opportunity for Anna to get involved with Trinity Access 21. In the second year, she was matched with a student who studied at Trinity to discuss what university life looks like. Anna feels that this programme should be introduced in the fourth year, as at the time she was not interested in the university. In the third year, Trinity Access 21 provided a chance for getting working experience. Anna got a place in a pharmaceutical company with an assigned mentor, who provided her with great support. After this opportunity, she got another mentored work placement, at JP Morgan. She found the mentor there particularly helpful, as he was able to share his experience about the different university programmes, explained the opportunities one can get by going to the university, and presented different job options to her.

Bridge 21 programme was another initiative of Trinity Access 21 that Anna joined. During the transition year, she moved to Trinity campus for a week to do media studies. Sharing ideas with participants from other schools helped build her confidence and develop her communication skills. She made new friends and learned how to adapt to a new, unknown environment.

Anna believes that Trinity Access 21 helped her to learn life skills and narrow down her options for when she had finished secondary school. The informal and relaxed environment where you can freely ask any kind of question makes this programme different from school and exposes students to various opportunities, which Anna summarised in the following way: *'I am very well-educated with life, and I feel I matured as I went through all these programmes.'*

'I got an opportunity and I am grasping it with both hands. I am thankful.'

Sam is a man in his mid-forties who joined Speedpak Enhanced Skills Traineeship (Speedpak) in July 2018. He left school more than 20 years ago, as he married young. Sam applied to take part in the traineeship because he wanted to change his career path. After years working in the catering industry, he was ready to change his career, but he did not know where to start. The opportunity came by chance when he came across the Speedpak staff member who was promoting the traineeship in the local shopping centre. He enrolled on the course, got an interview, and was selected for the programme. Sam explains that there was low risk involved in this decision, as the programme lasts for only 30 weeks, and it would definitely expose him to something new.

The traineeship is designed along theoretical and practical lines. It begins with a six-week block of classroom learning when different tutors deliver a variety of modules, including customer service, health and safety, database, personal effectiveness, team projects, leadership, communication, and warehousing. This is followed by a work placement, which initially lasts for four weeks. Another four weeks are dedicated for learning in the classroom, and the course is completed with another eight weeks of work placement.

The programme uses a self-directed style of learning based on sharing experiences with other students. Sam says that this approach helped him expand his knowledge and learn new skills. He liked team projects most because they allowed students to reflect on their work and learn how to resolve the problems together. He learned that the attitude is more important than the aptitude. He is more confident now and he does not fear learning any more.

A work placement proved to be the most valuable experience for Sam. Speedpak provided students with a list of industry partners and asked them to choose two that they would be interested to work with. He got a placement with a pharmaceutical company, which he finds very enjoyable to work in. Sam believes that taking part in the traineeship was a life changer: *'I am a lot happier as I've been in the last years… Speedpak taught me that it is never too late to start with education and to do something completely different in life.'*

Project 3: iScoil

'The work is not too bad, not as bad as real school.'

Due to a family dispute, Sean never progressed into the secondary level of education. The Education Welfare Officer contacted him and proposed continuing with schooling through a blended learning programme. Sean joined iScoil at the end of 2016.

A local community centre provided face-to-face support and access to computers, and all the courses were delivered online. A student-centred approach was used to deliver the programme. Learners could choose between five to six courses and pursue their interests in learning. The courses were delivered three times a week; each day was dedicated to a different course. Students were encouraged to finish the work in their own time. An online mentor was appointed to support Sean's work and guide him through the workload. He helped Sean to explore his interest in cars by taking a course in mechanics, together with maths, communications, digital media, and health and fitness, all accredited at QQI level 3.

No exams or homework were prescribed, which made the course accessible to young people with mental health problems. Sean mentions that working online was easier than school, and he was able to learn fast. iScoil students were at different learning levels, and

the technology assisted their learning.

This personalised approach to learning helped Sean develop various skills, such as communication, social skills, and life skills (e.g., how to write a CV and apply for a job). Sean says he is more confident now and he knows how to plan things in advance. He made many new friends through iScoil, and he thinks that blended learning is particularly good for introverted young people.

iScoil learners can continue with QQI level 4, join Youthreach, or return to mainstream education after completing the programme. Sean is working with his father now, and in the future he plans to start his own business. He concludes: *'iScoil gave me more of a normal start. School sets you aiming too high.'*

'They take an interest in what you have an interest in, and they don't force you to do subjects you don't enjoy.'

Eileen is a young woman in her twenties studying at UCC. She experienced high levels of anxiety at school when she was younger. Her health deteriorated in secondary school when she moved to a bigger school with over 800 students. She described relationships at school as formal and hierarchical. For her, time pressures and workload took over her life and impacted upon her well-being at school. The number of subjects increased, and there was no support available for her in this setting. Eileen believes that mainstream school was not healthy for her: *'In the mainstream there were days when I couldn't write any name because my hands were shaking too badly.'* The situation deteriorated in her fourth year, when she missed all the classes. This is when her mother got worried and made contact with Cork Life Centre. Eileen was invited to an interview and joined the programme that September.

Cork Life Centre is less formal and less structured than a mainstream school. It is mostly run by volunteers. Initially Eileen found it hard to settle in, but with time she realised that learning in the Centre is good for her. Student-centred and needs-led approaches are used to support students through the learning. The staff decided not to give homework to Eileen, as she experienced high levels of stress and anxiety. The relationships with teachers and other staff members were very cooperative, and they were all called by their first names. The teachers were learning together with the participants, whom they see first as people and then as students. They follow students' interests and needs and deliver courses in small classes.

The classes were delivered five days a week from 9.30 a.m. to 3.30 p.m. In comparison to school, she was able to test the subjects first and change them if she did not like them. She could take breaks during the classes if needed. The Centre provided students with breakfast and lunch, but she did not avail of this option due to the anxiety she developed around food.

Cork Life Centre exposed Eileen to many opportunities, such as applying to a writing competition, and gave her a chance to write her own book. The staff approached her with different opportunities they thought she may be interested in. This makes the Centre different from the school, where, according to Eileen, one must put oneself forward to achieve something: *'Here is this atmosphere of safe calmness … more like a family or support system.'*

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Project 5: Churchfield Community Trust

'This place is more like a family. People are looking after you.'

John did not have an easy upbringing; he left education early and got involved in anti-social behaviour at a young age. Two years ago, he joined Churchfield Community Trust as part of the community probation service. His expectations about the programme were initially very low: he wanted to get involved in something that would keep him busy and structured. The recovery side of the programme was a bonus, as it helped him to stay sober and clean.

John was sceptical about taking part in courses, but as time passed he was eager to try something new and wanted to attend every available course, such as nutrition, cookery, mindfulness and suicide awareness, acupuncture, and health and safety. He became a member of Churchfield Community Trust rowing club and started to run marathons. *'It was never suggested to do something I was not ready for,'* John said when I asked how he got involved in the courses. The staff approached him and exposed him to different opportunities, which he was ready to take: *'This programme is structured to meet people where they are at and not where Churchfield is at.'* Slowly, he developed trust in other people in Churchfield Community Trust.

The staff were very approachable; they provided academic, practical, and emotional support if needed. On a weekly basis John met with an in-house psychologist, who helped him to reflect on past behaviours and decisions. A facilitated and guided group therapy was organised over the weekends. Sharing experience with other participants and seeing them progressing and changing for the better was invaluable. John says that he also wanted to experience change: *'They were like me and now they are doing courses, and they learned how to write academic essays and how to cook. If it worked for them, it will work for me also.'* As the weeks went by, he was finding his feet and was able to explore what he likes most at the programme.

John never did his Leaving Certificate, but eventually he became confident enough to take part in an evening QQI level 5 course and a facilitation training course. For him this course is a stepping-stone to get to university, where he wants to study mental health and community studies. At first, he was nervous as he was not sure he would be able for it. John talks passionately about the magic of bonding with other participants and the staff and building confidence to move on. In terms of the opportunities he got when joining Churchfield Community Trust, he said: *'In a sense it is hard to put into words about this place … it is very spiritual in a sense. I would have a bad day, and a couple of lads would come and pick me up … we would talk the language of the heart.'*

'Trinity helped me to change my life for the better.'

Lisa joined the Trinity Centre for People with Intellectual Disabilities (TCPID) in 2015, when they introduced a QQI level 5 course. Her previous experience with her secondary school was not very positive. She felt isolated, and other students made fun of her disability. Lisa's mental health deteriorated; she felt suicidal and did not want to go back to school again. There was no support available, and she felt invisible and lonely.

When she joined TCPID, Lisa did not expect to make any friends, as her main focus was to get a QQI level 5 qualification. However, the students developed strong bonds as the course went on. They helped each other with their class work and tried to understand the study material together. A socialising aspect of the group developed when they joined a student society at Trinity, through which they became good friends and developed social skills and built their confidence.

The course was delivered three times a week and was structured around different modules, including human rights, learning theory and practice, and entrepreneurship and disability. She learned how to develop a business plan and start a business. The course helped students develop communication, teamwork, and presentation skills. The TCPID staff were very supportive from the beginning. They picked Lisa up every morning from her house and provided academic support. There was also an

occupational therapist available, providing one-to-one support. Lisa was always treated like every other student: *'I was a normal Trinity student. It was nice to be treated normally.'* Lisa mentions that the role of the staff was particularly important during the transition into further employment or education. Lisa feels more confident and independent after finishing the course. She is also aware of her rights, and she does not want to be seen only through her disability any more.

Lisa found work placement particularly insightful and useful. With the help of the course coordinator, she sent her CV to various businesses and got a positive response from Bank of Ireland. She started on placement in the first week in February. A mentor was appointed to her and Lisa found her very supportive. She took her to different events and meetings and exposed her to different work responsibilities. This was a very valuable experience for Lisa: *'I was treated as a normal employee, and I was not judged for my disability.'* Bank of Ireland was very happy with Lisa's work and extended her contract twice.

Lisa's graduation day is scheduled for January 2019. She is proud of her achievement and expects to have many new opportunities available in future: *'I am looking forward to the graduation because it means that I have turned another chapter in the book of my life.'*

Project 7: Preparation for Education, Training & Employment (PETE)

'It is much better coming here than going on the streets … There are people who understand you.'

Pavel was homeless in the past, but things started to change 18 months ago when he got his own accommodation. His key worker suggested joining Preparation for Education, Training & Employment (PETE). The meeting with the PETE staff was arranged, and he started to come to the service 2–3 times a week to use computers and study English. Recently, he started to attend more regularly. PETE keeps Pavel busy and brings a structure to his life.

Studying English at PETE is based on self-directed learning, which makes it different from school. Pavel thinks that schools provide 'dry education', while courses at PETE are less structured and participants can discuss topics they are truly interested in. Tutors provide one-to-one support: they help participants to go through the learning material, correct their mistakes, and teach them new words. Pavel uses their help for improving his reading and spelling skills. Participants decide how much time they want to spend on a specific topic.

Staff members provide academic and practical support, for example drafting official letters or offering advice on issues such as social welfare. Pavel thinks that they are very friendly and approachable;

they make Pavel feeling accepted and understood. When I ask Pavel about the reasons for coming back to PETE, he responds: *'It is a nice atmosphere here, and when I need something there is help everywhere. PETE provides me with opportunities to learn something new.'* He never looks at the time when he is at PETE.

PETE keeps Pavel busy and exposes him to healthy choices. He says that going there makes every day enjoyable. Pavel's future aspirations are focused on improving his skills and finding a job. He does not know what he wants to do yet, but he believes that by getting a certain level of education and improving his English, his options will expand: *'At the moment it is easy and I feel good here.'*

'It's a lovely welcoming atmosphere; it is like an open circle. You put your music on, read a poem, and you leave everything at the front door.'

Ciara, a woman in her thirties, left school early. She did a PLC course when she was 19, but she was not really interested in school and did it only for a laugh. There was no support provided for students at the time; the relationships with the staff and teachers were hierarchical, and students were talked down to. Career guidance support was provided when she finished with school, but Ciara believes that college was not an option for her at the time. She was a young mother, and she worked in a call centre for the next 12 years.

Three years ago, Ciara got a leaflet in the post promoting An Cosán's programmes. After attending an open day, she decided to start with a FETAC level 5 Community Development course. She really liked the programme and continued with a degree course in Addiction Studies. The course is delivered every Thursday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and one Saturday per month. The course is divided into several modules delivered by a tutor with expertise in a specific area. It also provides students with the opportunity to visit different community-based services dealing with addiction. Recently, one module was delivered online, which enabled students from other parts of the country to participate in the class.

According to Ciara, a warm atmosphere and heartfelt relationships with other participants and the staff make An Cosán different from regular college: *'There is a lovely smell of scones and other types of food when you come in in the morning.'* She describes relationships with the other 20 participants as intimate and trustworthy: *'We have a laugh … and sometimes it is very deep.'* Academic support provided by former An Cosán students is particularly valuable, as they experienced similar issues in the past. An Cosán's staff are always ready to help, and they understand that life sometimes interferes with studies.

Ciara believes that An Cosán made her aware of her skills and potential. This experience changed her for the better; she learned how to stand up for herself and became an advocate of education. The course exposed her to new life opportunities, which she summarises as follows: *'It's an amazing place. It is the best thing I've ever done.'*

Project 9: Aspire 2

'They allow you to dream what you want to dream and they help you to get there.'

Martin is a second-year student at Maynooth University. He is an alumni student of Aspire 2 and has been involved in its activities for a few years. He describes Aspire 2 as an out-of-school programme which helps students complete their second-level education successfully and explore their future options. It is difficult to explain what the programme is about, but in general participants are supported to aspire to become someone.

Engineering company DPS introduced the Aspire 2 programme to four schools: two in Dublin and two in Cork. A DPS coordinator made contact with Martin's school, and a group of students in his class were asked if they want to be involved in a youth advisory panel. A total of 18 young people from the four schools joined the panel and were asked to think what they would like to do. The panel developed organically first, with members getting to know each other gradually. Eventually, they became a student representative body and worked with the schools on suggesting changes. One of their initiatives was to provide food for after-school classes.

Mentorship is at the core of the Aspire 2 programme. Martin found them very passionate, as they believe in their mentees and want to see them doing well in life. They shared their personal experiences about their career and study life, to show students that there are many pathways one can take in life. Mentors taught students that they need to plan everything to be able to achieve their goals. Martin says that this approach is very different from what he was taught at school: *'The voice I was given was just from the textbook, while a mentor offered advice based on their own personal experience.'*

Aspire 2 uses a student-led approach in organising discussions and group talks. Students suggest work and education-related areas they would like to discuss, while Aspire 2 invites people from different backgrounds to talk about their experiences. Students can always ask questions and make comments. Martin mentions that other programmes of the same kind are more prescriptive and often only promote themselves. He believes that Aspire 2 genuinely cares about students and their needs.

Martin says that he became more confident and independent since he joined Aspire 2. He made many new contacts through the programme and got work experience as an engineer with DPS. He learned how to plan to change things in life. In the mainstream school, he was taught to memorise things, but he did not understand how to apply knowledge beyond the school texts. Aspire 2 showed him the benefit of practical knowledge and different pathways that can be taken in life: *'Become who you want to be, regardless of where you come from or how you get there. If you want something, you'll get there no matter what. You just have to work hard.'*

'It is a bit like being at home. It is like an extended family almost.'

Ryan joined Citywise nine years ago, after his teacher recommended the programme to his parents. He found the atmosphere in Citywise much more positive: 'It is far more relaxed and personal than school.' He did not really fit in the school: the work was very repetitive, and he had only two or three friends to hang out with at the time. He was thinking about changing his school, but Citywise helped him to understand the school context better.

Most participants join the programme at a young age and continue to come until they are much older. Younger children are involved in playful activities, which in time become more academically driven. All tutors in Citywise are volunteers who want to see students excel. According to Ryan, it is very surprising that nearly everyone starts doing their work here: *'It is hard to explain what happens. It almost works itself out … most of the time they could have been convinced [to do work] by other people.'*

Fast Track is a student-led learning programme at the core of Citywise. In Ryan's experience, he was approached by a tutor who asked him if he wanted to join the programme and study Leaving Cert subjects together with other participants. A mentor was assigned to each participant. Mentors were former students who had similar experience with the Junior and Leaving Cert. Their advice and support were crucial for students to succeed. Ryan says: *'We knew that if it worked for mentors, it will work for us too.'* Ryan did maths, physics, and English for his Leaving Cert and got help with these subjects from an engineer. The programme includes other types of learning activities also, including visiting museums, taking trips, and talking about social media.

The Leadership Programme is run by former participants who try to give something back to Citywise. Ryan now helps run the programme and acts as a role model for younger participants. He says that Citywise gave him many opportunities, such as going on a trip to Poland and attending a camp at University College Dublin. Most importantly, he learned many new skills, and he believes that without Citywise he would never have gotten into university. He became more confident, learned about presentation skills, improved his public speaking skills, and developed fundraising and communication skills. He concludes: *'I would be a completely different person if I didn't come here.'*

3.3 Project Models

3.3.1 Introduction

Following on from the vignettes, a description of the projects in which those participants are based is now provided. The research and evaluation team worked with each Awardee in the write-up of their project model, based on a common template. Section 3.3.2 presents this information, which focuses on the key aspects of each of the 10 projects funded under the Education Fund. Statistics gathered directly by SIFI about project activities in the second half of 2018 are presented at the end of each project description. Referring back to Table 2.1, the purpose of this activity was to document the project models so that when triangulated with other data throughout the course of the activity, the evaluators will be able to answer the question *"In what setting does it work".*

3.3.2 Project Models

This section provides an overview of the 10 project models, focusing on the names of Awardees, projects' visions and missions, evidence of the need for the projects, and project summary. Basic data on the current number of registered participants, interventions, and employees from the second half of 2018 is also available under each presentation.

Project No. 1: Trinity Access 21

Awardee Name

Trinity Development and Alumni, TCD

Vision and Mission

Trinity Access 21 (TA21) aims to transform the Irish education system, in partnership with schools, communities, other education organisations, and businesses, so that every student can reach their full educational potential. It aspires to an education system that supports every young person in reaching their full academic potential.

Evidence of the Need for this Project

Research indicates that student underperformance at second level can be attributed to long-term processes of educational disadvantage. This reduces the number of students from these types of backgrounds who go on to third level. Barriers often include long-term and multi-generational disengagement from education, and traditional school systems and processes that can prove unsuitable to students. The lack of formal and informal information and advice, and role models for students, are also limiting.

Project Summary

Trinity Access 21 is targeting post-primary school students in schools with low levels of progression to third level. Students are provided with one-to-one mentoring, group work, and team-based workshops. In addition to the student focus, the initiative is providing continuing professional development for teachers and assisting with school development, with a view to instigating systemic change. Recruitment of schools is on a voluntary basis. Key collaborators of the programme are Trinity's School of Education, Bridge 21, and Trinity Access Programmes. In project phase 2, they intend to work with new partners – Dublin City Council, Tipperary Education and Training Board, Laois–Offaly Education and Training Board, and Tralee Institute of Technology – to implement the model in rural and urban settings.

The project aims to engage the whole school in a change of culture, moving to an active learning approach and empowering the students as learners.

They follow four core principles or activities to achieve that:

- **Pathways to College** provides information on college courses and options to students so that they can make the best choice for themselves.

- **Mentoring** with a current college student, people from local business, or community groups from a comparable background is provided to young people to bond with and draw inspiration from.

- **Leadership through Service** is an activity based on student-led group projects focused on improving the school or local community. This activity gives students the chance to take up a leadership role in social initiatives.

- **Continuing Professional Development** provides teachers with 21st-century Teaching and Learning Practices that empower them to use a more active and collaborative approach in the classroom, while incorporating technology into their lessons. Teachers are supported to become facilitators in the classroom, empowering the students to take ownership of their own learning.

In the second half of 2018, there were one part-time and 13 full-time employees, and 500 volunteers involved in the project. Three new jobs – one mid-level and two entry-level positions – were created in this period. A total of 10,291 participants coming from socio-economic disadvantaged areas in Dublin and aged 13–18 years were registered on the project. Trinity Access 21 provided 50 interventions: 13 training days and 37 workshops. The aim of this project is to support participants in gaining QQI level 5, QQI level 7, and above.

Project No. 2: Speedpak Enhanced Skills Traineeship (Speedpak)

Awardee Name

Speedpak CLG trading as Speedpak Group, Speedpak Contracts Services, and Shamrock Rosettes.

Vision and Mission

Speedpak Group's vision is to build its trading business to provide industry work experience and training opportunities to long-term unemployed people, transforming their lives through employment and greater job resilience. *Traineeship Mission* is to match local long-term unemployed talent with quality career opportunities by enabling long-term unemployed people to access industry-led training, leading to a National Traineeship.

Evidence of the Need for this Project

It is estimated that in Ireland there are 15,000 young people who are not involved in education or employment. In 2017 the unemployment rate under 25 years was 11.3% (twice the overall employment rate of 6.8%). Young males represent 60% of those unemployed. The unemployment rate is particularly high in north Dublin, where the need for an employment-focused programme is apparent.

Project Summary

This traineeship is a new development for Speedpak Group (subsequently referred to as Speedpak) and is based on market research for future recruitment needs and the skills required for obtaining semi-skilled work in a specific industry sector. It follows a successful pilot programme run by Speedpak which was evaluated between 2016 and 2017. This traineeship is a unique collaboration between the State, industry, community, and philanthropy to match long-term unemployed talent with available jobs. This Manufacturing, Supply Chain and Customer Service Logistics traineeship is jointly developed by programme partners Coláiste Dhúlaigh College of Further Education, Speedpak, and Industry Cluster. Speedpak is the lead industry partner and primary recruiter, houses the formal training, provides job coaching and mentoring, supports the programme's coordination, and provides industry placement and follow-up.

The traineeship programme combines formal accredited training and work experience where the participant develops the job-seeking, work, and industry skills required to progress to employment. The programme is targeted at young people who are Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) and other long-term unemployed people. A tailored recruitment strategy is designed to reach out to this cohort living in the community. Referrals of NEET young people and other unemployed people are sourced through programme partners, Coláiste Dhúlaigh, and community partners including the Northside Partnership local development company and other community organisations (e.g., Community Training Centre, colleges of further education), INTREO, and through Speedpak's recruitment campaigns (flyers, Facebook, website, in person in local shopping centres). All applicants are invited to an information session in Speedpak comprising a short presentation about the programme and a tour of Speedpak. They are then interviewed by representatives of Speedpak and Coláiste Dhúlaigh, to identify applicants who will benefit most from the traineeship. This 30-week programme comprises a one-week induction and orientation, formal learning, and two periods (4 and 8 weeks) of industry placements.

The traineeship provides individuals with low educational and commercial experience with a nationally recognised traineeship certification comprising accredited training QQI levels 4 and 5, and industry-level skills certification, including Fork Lift Licence, to be able to target job opportunities available in a specific sector. Key activities of the programme include work experience and work on personal development – motivation, self-confidence, qualifications, and preparing for employment (updated CVs, individual learning and career plan and goals, one-to-one job coaching).

In the first traineeship, 13 participants were recruited: 12 males and 1 female were enrolled on the programme in the second half of 2018. Seven participants were members of minority groups. In this period, eight people completed the programme and four did not. Seven participants were aged 26–35 and six were aged 36–45. A total of 140 interventions – 90 training days, 40 placements, two mentoring sessions, and eight designated employment supports – were delivered by 11 staff members and 6 volunteers. One male participant progressed into employment during this period.

Awardee Name

iScoil

Vision and Mission

iScoil envisages that every young person has access to an innovative and flexible model of education. Its mission is to provide an inclusive response to address educational disadvantage.

Evidence of the Need for this Project

In 2011, 58,175 students completed and 1,466 did not complete the Junior Certificate. A 1% reduction of the average early school leaving rate would provide the EU economy with 500,000 additional qualified young people (EU 2020 Agenda). iScoil has received numerous requests from local youth services and agencies to set up blended learning centres in their community or area. Tusla referrals increase year on year, and iScoil can only accept approximately 40% of home referrals.

Project Summary

The iScoil blended learning model works to provide a safe environment where young people can reengage with education, achieve recognised certification (QQI levels 3 and 4) and access further education, training, and employment opportunities. Young people aged 13–16 years who are out of mainstream education for at least six months are referred to iScoil from Tusla.

The needs and circumstance of each student are considered to allow the development of an educational programme that provides a safe and encouraging place to learn. The holistic approach of iScoil's blended learning model allows students the opportunity to reengage with learning in a positive way. The focus of the programme is not limited to accreditation but focuses on the personal development of each student and their progression route to further education and training. iScoil works in partnership with local agencies and youth services nationally to provide blended learning opportunities for young early school leavers. One-to-one and online modalities of intervention are provided to each student based on their needs, interests, and abilities.

The main characteristics of the programme are:

- Student-centred approach
- Project-Based Learning
- Individual Education Plans
- Partnership Approach
- Agile Learning Design
- Innovative use of emerging technology
- Collaborative support and open communication
- Flexible and adaptable learning plans and choices
- Formative feedback and portfolio assessment
- Interest-led and accessible content
- Multiple modes of submission and assessment.

A total of 21 of the total 40 participants began the programme in the second half of 2018; 27 male and 13 female participants aged 13–18 were registered. Eight were members of minority groups, and three participants with disabilities were involved in the programme. Participants came from 16 Irish counties: Carlow (1), Clare (2), Cork (2), Dublin (4), Kerry (1), Kildare (6), Laois (1), Limerick (4), Longford (5), Louth (1), Meath (1), Offaly (2), Sligo (1), Tipperary (3), Wexford (2), and Wicklow (4). Five full-time and 10 part-time employees were involved in running iScoil, with 40 tutorials being delivered in this time.

Project No. 4: Cork Life Centre

Awardee Name:

Cork Life Centre

Vision and Mission

The Cork Life Centre's vision is to provide a unique and alternative environment for education where students and staff are both learners and teachers. Its mission is to build an open and safe community space between students and staff through respect, compassion, and equality, and to support and empower young people to build better futures.

Evidence of the Need for this Project

Based on Department of Education figures, 88 in 1000 young people in Ireland do not complete their secondary education. For students in DEIS schools this figure rises to 200 in 1000. Of the 2011 secondary-school entry cohort, 91.2% sat the Leaving Cert exams in 2014 or 2015. The average retention rate for DEIS schools in the same period and cohort was 85% (DES Report Retention Rate of Pupils in Second Level Schools 2011 Entry Cohort, 2018). Research shows that there are different reasons why young people do not complete secondary education, including anxiety and mental health issues, and school absence.

Project Summary

At the core of Cork Life Centre's ethos is the desire to place the student's voice at the centre, by following the idea that each day is a new day and a student is not labelled by their previous behaviour or experiences. A holistic approach is followed that focuses on both social and personal development and academic education. Due to the needs and backgrounds of the students, the centre is built on an ethos of trust and implemented through the 'Servol' model. Children and young people aged 12–18 years who have disengaged or are at risk of disengaging from mainstream education, and students who experienced educational disadvantage, participate in the programme. Students are referred to the programme by Education Welfare Officers, parents, and other agencies (CAMHS, Tusla, Drug Treatment Services, and similar). Once a student is referred, the Cork Life Centre ensures that the student wants to attend the programme voluntarily; it does not accept students through coerced referral.

One-to-one tutoring is offered to students particularly at junior cycle. This is in tandem with providing students with access to their peers and opportunities to build social skills and be a part of a community. Students are offered the possibility of engaging in one-to-one counselling and therapeutic work in the centre. Cork Life Centre established links with numerous agencies and services in Cork City across the areas of business, academia, and health, and with local community groups.

Cork Life Centre provides one-to-one and small-group teaching and tutoring to Junior Cert and Leaving Cert students. It provides not only educational supports but a wraparound service encompassing support, outreach, and referral network into other appropriate services (mental health, probation, and other services). Key activities are: (1) learning and teaching, (2) mentoring, (3) programmes for social and personal development, (4) outreach, (5) advocacy, and (6) therapeutic work.

Six employees and 53 volunteers were working on the project in the second half of 2018. In total, 55 participants were registered on the programme: 35 male and 20 female students. Another 22 were newly registered. Five participants progressed into employment in this period. Almost all participants (n = 52) were aged 13–18, while three were aged 19–25. Cork Life Centre delivered 134 QQI level 3, 4, and 5 educational interventions in this time, including training, workshops, tutorials, medical, mental health, and other interventions.

Project No. 5 - Churchfield Community Trust

Awardee Name

Churchfield Community Trust

Vision and Mission

Churchfield Community Trust's mission is to develop a caring community with young men and women in Churchfield and the surrounding areas.

Evidence of the Need for this Project

There are significant challenges present in the local area in the context of substance misuse addiction in Churchfield:

- Trans-generational unemployment has presented as a significant challenge

- Low educational attainment because of early school leaving is significant.

Churchfield Community Trust as a community-based organisation liaises with the Probation Service and post-release agencies for re-integration in communities of origin.

Project Summary

Churchfield Community Trust follows the principles and core values of the 'Servol' model in its work. It focuses on building relationships and fostering open, honest, and direct communication by using therapy. At the core of Churchfield Community Trust work are acceptance, respect, instilling a belief that life can be different, and promoting self-awareness and responsibility. The target group are people aged 18–35 who have experienced alcohol and substance misuse. Participants are referred to Churchfield Community Trust through Probation Services in Cork or self-referral. The service provides one-to-one counselling and group work interventions to participants. It has established links with a range of agencies, services and academic institutions, including University College Cork, Probation Service, HSE, Cork Foyer, IASIO, Drug Task Force, Focus Ireland, and Cork City Council.

Key activities organised by Churchfield Community Trust are:

- **In-House Programme:** This programme provides participants with an opportunity to continue with QQI levels 3 and 4 of education. They can choose between three types of programmes: horticulture, communications, and woodcraft.

- **Outreach Programme:** Participants can avail of different types of supports through this programme, including: literacy, study skills, sexual health briefing, money advice, alcohol/substance, and offending behaviour programmes.

- **Community Enterprise:** Progression to work-based training in the context of work placement in the Garden Cafe, at Compass Crafts workshops and Gearrai an Eaonaig Horticulture initiative. The focus here is on mentoring through experiential learning and preparation for the workplace or continuing adult education.

Churchfield Community Trust also supports external individual learning that may enhance students' employment opportunities (e.g., health and safety training, occupational first aid). It also provides career guidance and CV preparation advice.

In the first half of 2018, 10 of the 30 participants were newly registered in this project.[1] Approximately two thirds of participants were male (n = 21) and one third were female (n = 9). On average, Churchfield Community Trust participants were aged 19–35. A total of 14 people were working on this project in this period.

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[1] Churchfield Community Trust received a one-year fund from SIFI which finished in January 2019. The last data gathered from this project was from the first half of 2018.

Project No. 6: Trinity Centre for People with Intellectual Disabilities (TCPID)

Awardee Name

Trinity Development and Alumni, TCD

Vision and Mission

The core mission of the Trinity Centre for People with Intellectual Disabilities (TCPID) is to address the educational disadvantages experienced by people with intellectual disabilities by providing a high-quality higher-education programme designed to enhance the capacity of this group of people to participate fully in society as independent adults.

Evidence of the need for this Project

Statistics shows there are 194,779 people with an intellectual disability in Ireland (Census, 2011). A total of 16% of people with disabilities aged 15–49 had completed no higher than primary-level education, compared with 5% of the general population in this age group. Furthermore, learners with intellectual disabilities are not deemed eligible for local authority grants for fees or maintenance. TCPID fills this gap by providing QQI level 5 education to people with intellectual disability and has an enrolment of 10–15 learners per academic year.

Project Summary

TCPID aims to promote the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in education and society. Its mission is to enable people with an intellectual disability to develop their potential through a combination of high-quality research, dissemination of new knowledge, lifelong learning, and professional training. The Centre provides people who have intellectual disabilities with the opportunity to participate in a higher education programme designed to enhance their capacity to participate fully in society as independent adults. Prospective students apply individually for acceptance to the TCPID, with a supporting application from their school and evidence of disability documents. Occupational therapy groups and individual work are also included in the programme. The Centre provides learners with mentoring, work experience, and career guidance. Key partners of the programme come from business, including companies and banks (e.g., Abbott, CPL, and Bank of Ireland).

Key activities of TCPID revolve around the following areas:

- **Course work:** Students study across six interdisciplinary themes which help them develop different learning skills: Research Methods, Applied Science, Technology and Maths, Business and Marketing, Advocacy and Rights and Culture, and Fine Arts and Languages.

- **Work Experience:** Enable people with intellectual disabilities to successfully engage with employment opportunities through work placements and subsequent employment.

- **Links to further progression avenues:** Provide models of good practice in establishing viable transition pathways to employment or further education.

- **Mentoring:** Facilitate the development of a mentoring programme with partner employers to ensure sustainability and provision of appropriate support to people with intellectual disabilities in the workplace.

- **Career Guidance:** Enable people with intellectual disabilities to make informed decisions about their future trajectory (further education or employment) with the support of knowledgeable professionals (OT service established).

TCPID reported that 10 out of 28 learners (11 male and 17 female) started with the programme in the second half of 2018. Five employees devoted their time to work on this programme. 27 learners involved in this programme were from Leinster and one was from Munster; 22 participants were aged 19–25 years, five were aged 26–35, and one was aged 36–45. Six participants completed a QQI level 5 education programme in this time. 35 interventions were delivered in this period: 11 placements, 11 mentoring sessions, 11 designated employment supports, and two other interventions. Nine participants progressed into part-time employment in this period.

Awardee Name

Focus Ireland

Vision and Mission

PETE's mission is to sustain exits from homelessness by supporting people to engage in mainstream education, training, or employment and providing them with an opportunity to earn an income.

Evidence of the Need for this Project

The national assessment of social housing need (Focus Ireland, 2017) finds that nearly 7 in 10 of those in need are people who are unemployed or lone parents; 4 in 10 of those on the list were reliant on Rent Supplement to pay their rent. Of families in need of emergency accommodation in Dublin, at least 3 in 4 are either unemployed or full-time lone parents reliant on a social welfare income. Less than a fifth of families presenting to homeless services are in part-time work, and only 5% are in full-time work.[2] Affordability is clearly a critical issue in avoiding homelessness, and access to a sufficient income is essential to sustaining that exit.

Project Summary

Focus Ireland's (FI) Preparation for Education, Training and Employment (PETE) programme helps people who have been homeless, or are at risk of homelessness, to engage with training and education so that they are able to get paid employment, making their exit from homelessness more sustainable. The PETE programme is geared both to preventing homelessness and supporting those who have been homeless to achieve sustainable, independent living. PETE does not aim to replicate existing services, but to provide vulnerable and disadvantaged groups with the flexibility and support to successfully progress from the crisis of homelessness to the stability of paid work and a place to call home.

To achieve its aims, PETE cooperates with numerous agencies and services across the areas of training and education, employment, 'flanking', and housing. To mention some: Tusla, Pobal, Education and Training Boards, Solas, Intreo, and Peter McVerry

Trust. PETE's participants are currently homeless or identified as being at risk of homelessness. The service provides them with one-to-one support and participation in mainstream training. People can self-refer to the programme or can be appointed by other stakeholders who have working relationships with Focus Ireland.

PETE aims to support participants to build the confidence and skills to overcome personal challenges, so that they can live independently and have a place to call home.

Key aspects of the PETE core model are:

- individualised plan
- appropriate training and supports
- accredited training
- flexibility.

Participants can access the service at multiple entry points, and their trajectories are not necessarily linear: they are tailored to meet the individual needs of each user.

In the second half of 2018, five full-time and two part-time employees worked on the project. A total of 918 interventions, such as tutoring, mentoring, and designated employment supports were provided in this period. Of the 350 participants registered with PETE, 189 were new entrants. 151 people from Munster and 199 from Leinster attended the PETE programme. Participants' ages ranged greatly: one was aged 13–18, 115 were aged 19–25, 112 were aged 26–35, and 112 were aged 36–45. 139 participants completed the PETE programme and 211 did not. There were more men (n = 208) than women (n = 142) present on the programme. A total of 34 people who completed the QQI level 3 education progressed into employment.

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[2] Focus Ireland (2017) *Insights into Family Homelessness no. 10.* www.focusireland.ie/resource-hub/research/.

Project No. 8: An Cosán VCC

Awardee Name

The Shanty Educational Project Ltd.

Vision and Mission

An Cosán's vision is to help create a society free from all forms of poverty and inequality, rich in resources where young adults have access to the education they need to enhance their well-being and to achieve their full potential. For this purpose, it is crucial to create partnerships with existing local education centres, which provide amenities and recruit and support learners.

Evidence of the Need for this Project

Research shows that educational attainment is a powerful predictor of adult life opportunity. For example, a lone parent educated to third level will earn 40% more than someone without a degree. Approximately 30,000 people engage in independent community education programmes annually. Only a very small percentage of these learners can access higher education in a community education context, with 81% of learners reporting not completing the Leaving Cert. This indicates that a blended model of online learning can provide wider access to education in community settings. At present, An Cosán Virtual Community College (VCC) is the first programme in Ireland that provides higher-education access options, utilising a blended model of online learning and working with community.

Project Summary

An Cosán VCC seeks to empower women and men from disadvantaged communities across Ireland to achieve their educational potential and contribute to social change in their communities through a social action model of holistic community education using 21st-century learning technologies. Each learner's individual needs and assets are different, and the programme aims to create a 360-degree support scaffolding. An Cosán VCC is targeting young adults (age 18–30) living in isolated and disadvantaged communities who are not in employment, education, or training. Key activities of the programme include an entry-level model of higher education through a selection of programmes and introductory courses; a blended model of online learning, including live online classes, face-to-face workshops, mentoring,

and online resources, all at a pace that suits the learner; induction day; virtual classroom; and supports (eMentors, tutors, technology experts and guidance, and bursaries for learners unable to pay). Modalities of intervention include face-to-face workshops, technology workshops, live virtual classes, offline individual and group work, collaborative peer learning, and communities of practice.

Key collaborators of the programme are: IT Carlow, which is responsible for accreditation of An Cosán VCC's higher education programmes, Community Education Networks, Men's Shed, Family Resource Centres, and Change X. An Cosán VCC's community partner liaison as well as area-specific outreach coordinators (e.g., Youth Outreach Coordinator) manage the referral process to An Cosán's blended higher education programmes. An Cosán VCC partners with a wide range of community education organisations at local, regional, and national level to offer progression and access routes to third-level education. These partners include:

- Community and youth organisations
- Community partnership organisations (IACTO, AONTAS)
- Educational providers (Community Training Centre, Youthreach, ETBs)
- Access officers at third-level institutions, and adult guidance service providers
- Department of Social Protection.

In the second half of 2018 there were 134 students registered on the programme, of whom 102 were newly registered students; 31 male and 103 female students came from all four Irish provinces: 6 from Connacht, 28 from Munster, 80 from Leinster, and 20 from Ulster. Participants of different age groups attended the programme: 7 aged 19–25, 25 aged 26–35, 55 aged 36–45, 34 aged 46–55, 12 aged 56–65, and one aged 65 years and above. It is worth noting that the programme attracted a number of students belonging to minority groups (n = 18). 129 participants completed the programme in this period, and five did not. There are 12 staff working on the project, and 74 interventions (18 workshops and 56 tutorials) at QQI level 6 were delivered in this period.

Awardee Name

UCD Foundation

Vision and Evidence of the Need for this Project

The vision of the Aspire 2 programme is to redress the systemic inequality in the Irish education system. This vision is pursued by supporting students who live in areas of educational disadvantage to increase their prospects of completing the Leaving Cert and progressing to third-level education and other forms of further education, including apprenticeships.

Research and national statistics show that young people who live in areas of educational disadvantage are less likely to proceed to further education or apprenticeship. Aspire 2 aims to engage with these young people and support them during the Leaving Cert year to increase their chances of attending third-level education and other forms of training, including apprenticeships.

Project Summary

Aspire 2 is a programme which was established by the DPS company in 2015 as part of its Corporate Social Responsibility strategy. Its main aim is to support second-level students in completing their second-level education and making informed decisions about their future education and career pathways. Students aged 16–18 from four disadvantaged schools (two from Mayfield, Cork, and two from Ballyfermot, Dublin) and two additional schools (one from Crumlin, Dublin, and one from Faranree, Cork) are involved in the Aspire 2 programme. Students voluntarily join the programme through schools following introduction from DPS and Aspire 2. Aspire 2 provides students with group mentoring and work experience placement. Aspire 2 established a collaborative partnership with UCD, CIT, UCC, TCD, and IT Tallaght.

In the second half of 2018, two employees and six volunteers worked with 450 participants involved in the Aspire 2 programme. Out of 450 students (90 male and 360 female), 220 were new entrants. On average, they were aged 13–18. A total of 14 were students with disabilities, while 50 were members of minority groups. 160 students completed the

programme in this period. The participants were distributed between Munster (n = 250) and Leinster (n = 200). Aspire 2 provided 51 different events and interventions in this period. They support students to progress their education to QQI 5 level and above.

Key activities provided by Aspire 2 are:

- Participating schools can use the financial support for a wide range of initiatives designed to improve educational progression outcomes. These can include extra tuition, personal development workshops, after-study hubs, or to expose students to experiences outside the school curriculum, such as a trip to the theatre.

- **Student mentoring** sessions give students an opportunity to be mentored throughout the Leaving Cert. Topics covered are career advice, study plans, goal setting, motivation, and similar. A mentoring handbook has been developed by the Aspire 2 manager to guide new mentors on child protection, access routes, and other topics. The model is based on group mentoring: there are two mentors available for five students.

- **Student work experience** is provided during holidays for students so that they can gain life skills.

- **Youth advisory panels** were introduced to ensure that students get the right supports in preparation for their Leaving Cert. They meet with the project manager eight times a year;

- **Parent forums** in Dublin and Cork actively engage parents in their child's education. Parents are trained to facilitate educational workshops with other parents to disseminate information on access routes, CAO, supporting their child through the Leaving Cert, etc.).

Project No. 10: Fast Track Academy

Awardee Name

Citywise Education

Vision and Mission

Fast Track Academy aims to address the barriers arising due to social disadvantage that lead to low levels of educational attainment. Its vision is focused on improving communities through youth education by using a whole-person approach focused on academic support and personal development of young people.

Evidence of the Need for this Project

Participation rates in higher education in Tallaght are 29%, compared to an average in Dublin of 47%. Studies show that programmes (such as Fast Track Academy) which support students' motivation to learn and personal development are often missing from their educational experience.

Project Summary

The project incorporates social and academic skills as well as skills in adapting the behaviours and conditions necessary to increase the number of young people completing second level and transitioning to higher-level education. The programme is available for fifth-year and sixth-year students in Tallaght aged 15–19. Students are referred to the programme by participating schools and are involved in one-to-one mentoring and group work. The programme cooperates with other agencies in the community, such as IT Tallaght.

The Fast Track programme revolves around the following activities:

- It provides **information** to students to make them aware of the wide variety of options available to them. It provides teaching, mentoring, career guidance, and work placements to support decision-making. These on-going supports are positioned to convince students of the value of education and develop good personal work habits.

- Fast Track organises additional **classes in Leaving Cert subjects.**

- **Career talks** are organised to help students with CAO decisions. They meet professionals from a wide range of backgrounds, and group sessions are delivered monthly by volunteers.

- **Volunteer role models:** People from the locality act as volunteers and role models for young people. Currently there are 70 active volunteers, including teachers, retired teachers, past students, local business leaders, and similar.

- **Preparatory courses** for younger students in numeracy, literacy, STEM subjects, and personal development to prepare them to enrol in the Fast Track Academy when they turn 15 years of age.

In the second half of 2018 there were 80 new entrants out of 116 young people involved in the programme, run by 65 volunteers. A coordinator of the Fast Academy programme was employed in this period. 60 participants were male and 56 were female. All participants were based in Tallaght, Dublin, and were aged 13–18. The Fast Track Academy programme provided 1,042 interventions and services in this period. Young people attending the programme work towards QQI levels 3–5.
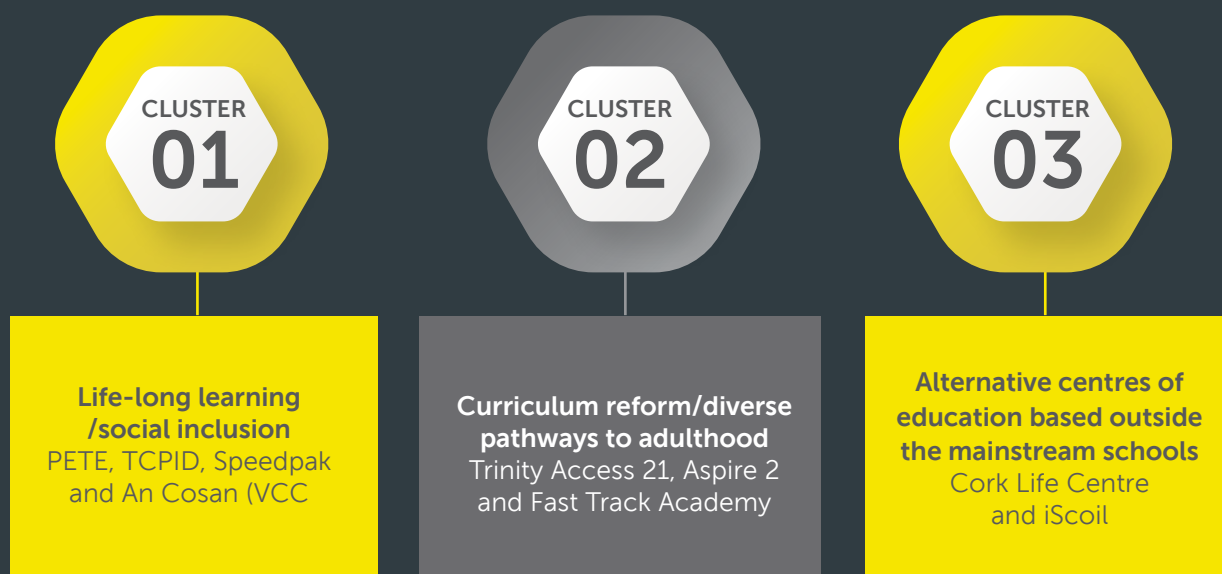
3.4 Project Clustering

In the documentation issued by SIFI calling for evaluators for the Education Fund, it was suggested to cluster Awardees together to share learning specific to their focus. For this purpose, in addition to the developing the vignettes and project models in year 1, the third task undertaken by the evaluators was to investigate the possibility of clustering similar projects[3] together. Therefore, documentary analysis (Bowen, 2009) was conducted on the project models as presented above. This was based on matching projects across four elements: vision, aims, and objectives; activities;[4] positionality towards the mainstream education system; and participants' age. The details of how the analysis was done for each of these four areas are contained in Appendix 1. The process of clustering also addressed Question 5a from Table 2.1: *In what settings does it work?*

3.4.1 Identification of Project Clusters

Following the final stage of the analysis, three clusters of projects emerged (Figure 3.2). This was based on patterns of similarities across the projects.

Figure 3.2: Outcome of the clustering process

CLUSTER 01

Life-long learning /social inclusion
PETE, TCPID, Speedpak and An Cosan (VCC

CLUSTER 02

Curriculum reform/diverse pathways to adulthood
Trinity Access 21, Aspire 2 and Fast Track Academy

CLUSTER 03

Alternative centres of education based outside the mainstream schools
Cork Life Centre and iScoil

These clusters were subsequently checked with each of the nine projects, where consensus was reached as to their accuracy. Therefore, as elements relating to Year 2 of the evaluation are implemented, the clusters will be used as a means of bringing projects together and encompassing the learning more deeply.

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[3] Churchfield Community Trust received a one-year grant from the SIFI Education Fund, and its participation in the project ceased in January 2019. Due to these changes, the project will not be involved in further stages of the clustering evaluation process.

[4] Other data based on sections of participation, referral process, type of intervention, theory, methods, and manual intervention was provided by the projects. Due to insufficient information provided in these sections, this data was not analysed.

3.5 Designing and Implementing a Soft Skills Measurement System for Participants

3.5.1 Rationale for and Process Used to Design a Soft Skills Measurement System

Given the collaborative nature used by the evaluators in developing the evaluation framework, the concept of 'soft skills' emerged from the three initial meetings held with Awardees (November 2017, February 2018, and May 2018). The hypothesis was that to successfully support a participant to secure a QQI level 3–6 qualification, Awardee projects often needed, first of all, to help participants bolster their soft skills. For Awardees, these non-cognitive soft skills were concepts such as a sense of worth, belonging, or self-esteem to name just a few. It was strongly suggested by the Awardees that the evaluation should capture this data and in doing so provide test their hypothesis fully.

Following a detailed review of soft skills in the literature, the evaluators opted for a quantitative approach, using a pre and post methodology. This element of the evaluation is reflected in Table 2.1 above and will help address the question *"How well does it work"*, referring specifically to the work of each project. The following steps were taken to create an instrument required to measure these soft skills.

Step 1: Creating a cross-project, supra-list of soft skills

Following group and subsequent one-to-one discussions with Awardees, the research and evaluation team collated a list of soft skills deemed to be the most important across all 10 projects. This list was then added to following an analysis of the project models from above, leading to the information shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Top 'soft skills' identified across all projects

KEY QUESTION	METRICS
1. Trinity Access 21	• Teamwork • Communication and problem-solving • Confidence • Making the best choice for themselves
2. Speedpak Enhanced Skills Traineeship (Speedpak)	• Focus on employment • Reliability, team working, can you follow instruction • Will you stick with a task • Are you approachable • Motivation • Confidence
3. iScoil	• Positive attitude to education • Self-confidence • Self-efficacy • Self-esteem
4. Cork Life Centre	• Managing behaviour • Managing anxiety • Can hold relationship /building • Self-esteem • Feeling of support • Feeling of belonging • To empower people
5. Churchfield Community Trust	• Interested in what works • Benefits of involvement • Individual have differences • Becoming interested and motivated • Engagement • Turning up every day; routine improvement • Personal responsibility, can-do, and self-belief • Changing beliefs and behaviours • Personal development

Table 3.1: Top 'soft skills' identified across all projects (continued)

KEY QUESTION	METRICS
6. Trinity Centre for people with Intellectual Disabilities (TCPID)	• Quality of life measures good for ID cohort • Increased confidence • Social skills • Love of learning; interest in knowledge • Reciprocity or capacity to give back to community • Development of so-called transferable skills • Participation in society as independent adults • Engage successfully with employment opportunities • Development of wide range of skills to access employment
7. Preparation for Education, Training and Employment Programme (PETE)	• Completing what you started – task completion • Social presentation skills • Respectful interaction • Communication • Personal responsibility
8. An Cosán VCC	• Self-efficacy • Problem-solving • Critical thinking • To empower adults • Collaborate learning • Communication skills
9. Aspire 2	• Confidence • Personal development • Social civic understanding of the world • Self-motivation • Willing to step outside comfort zone • Commitment to be involved outside of school context • Goal-setting • Planning • Motivation
10. Fast Track Academy	• Personal development • Empathy • Leadership • Coping skills • Social capital • Public-speaking capacity • Fundraising • Interacting with the public • Confidence • Social and academic skills

Black: skills discussed with the Awardees face to face.

Red: skills mentioned in the Awardees' applications or project profiles.

Step 2: Categorisation of Soft Skills

The most cited soft skills were noted and then categorised into clusters of skills (see Table 3.2). Three clusters emerged:

- **Social and employment skills**, including social and communication skills and transferable skills

- **Personal development skills,** focusing on skills which contribute to learners' personal development

- **Social inclusion/engagement skills,** focusing on areas such as social capital, community participation, social support, belonging, and engagement.

Table 3.2: Categorisation of the most cited soft skills

SOCIAL AND EMPLOYMENT SKILLS	PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT SKILLS	SOCIAL INCLUSION/ ENGAGEMENT SKILLS
• Communication/public speaking and presentation skills (6) • Motivation and persistence (5) • Problem-solving skills (2) • Teamwork (2) • Being approachable, relationship-building (2) • Leadership (2) • Collaborative learning (1) • Fundraising (1) • To step outside comfort zone (1) • Goal-setting and planning (1)	• Confidence (6) • Well-being, resilience, and coping (4) • Self-efficacy (2) • Self-esteem (2) • Empathy (1) • Making the best choice for themselves (1) • Personal responsibility (1) • Critical thinking (1)	• Social engagement and social capital (6) • Support (mentoring) and belonging (3) • Empowerment (2)

Step 3: Identification of existing validated quantitative measures

Step 3 involved identifying existing, validated, quantitative tools suitable for inclusion in this study. Following a detailed audit with projects, it transpired that only three of the 10 projects used standardised measures as part of their work: Trinity Access 21, Speedpak Enhanced Skills Traineeship, and Trinity Centre for People with Intellectual Disabilities. The general finding was that data collection in the other projects was rarely systematic and often focused on evaluating teaching and learning outcomes and satisfaction with the programmes,

rather than using standardised measurement tools.

Guided by the three categories outlined in Table 3.2, a review of the academic literature identified existing validated measures, which addressed the specific outcome areas. Combining these tools with elements of measures used by Trinity Access 21, a new questionnaire was created: *'Understanding You and Your Involvement in this Programme'* (see Appendix 2). It contains 131 questions, spread across the three soft skills categories, and incorporates the measures (or part thereof) shown in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3: Standardised measures used in 'Understanding You and Your Involvement in this Programme'

CATEGORY OF SOFT SKILLS	SECTION/TITLE IN QUESTIONNAIRE	SOURCE OF QUESTIONS	NUMBER OF QUESTIONS
Personal Development Skills	1. Coping and Resilience	(Ungar) Child and Youth Resilience Measure (CYRM-28)	28
	2. Self-Esteem	(Rosenberg) Self-Esteem Scale	10
	3. Well-being	(Butler & Kern) PERMA and flourishing	23
Social Inclusion Skills	4. Belonging and Engagement	Yorke (Belongingness, engagement, and self-confidence); Trinity Access 21 Instrument (Quaglia)	37
	5. Support and Mentoring	Trinity Access 21 Instrument; (Appleton) Student Engagement	6 2
Social and Employment Skills	6. Benefits of the Programme	Growing up in Ireland; Trinity Access 21 Instrument (Ravitz et al)	16 9

3.5.2 - Implementing the Soft Skills Questionnaire and the Participant Profile

Implementing the Soft Skills Questionnaire

Once the soft skills questionnaire was drafted, it was circulated to all projects for comment and review. The research and evaluation team then met with each project to discuss and collate their feedback. The final print and online versions of the questionnaire were created and circulated to Awardees in mid to late October 2018. Of the 10 projects, seven participated in the soft skills data collection, namely Speedpak, Aspire 2, Cork Life Centre, iScoil, An Cosán, Fast Track Academy and PETE. The research and evaluation team provided an implementation pack to each project, containing templates for participant information sheets, consent and assent forms and stamped addressed envelopes for returning the paper questionnaires. Each project subsequently operationalised the data collection themselves based on these guidelines.

This left three of the projects not involved in the data collection. The first of these was the TCPID. As it supports people with intellectual disabilities, it was agreed that an amended soft skills questionnaire, based on the same broad themes as the existing one, would be created, given the additional needs of this group. This was finalised in January 2019. The second project was the Churchfield Community Trust. As they were only funded to participate in the Evaluation Fund for one year, they had exited the programme by the time the soft skills data collection began. Therefore, they were not included. The third project was Trinity Access 21. Given the extensive evaluation system already in place for their work, it was agreed that it would not be necessary on this occasion for them to participate in the soft skills data collection.

Profile of Participants

A total of 182 participants from the seven projects took part in the first round of soft skills data collection (Time 1). As shown in Table 3.4, Fast Track Academy provided 26.4% (n=48) of the overall sample, and when combined with Aspire 2 (20.3%, n=37), Cork Life Centre (18.1%, n=33) and PETE (17.6%, n=32), accounted for 82.4% (n=150) of all participants.

Table 3.4: Numbers of participants for the soft skills data collection, by Project

	FREQUENCY	VALID PERCENT
iScoil	8	4.4
Speedpak	8	4.4
An Cosán	16	8.8
PETE	32	17.6
Cork Life Centre	33	18.1
Aspire 2	37	20.3
Fast Track Academy	48	26.4
Total	182	100.0

Despite the sample having an equal number of males and females (Male n= 89; 49.4%; Female n= 91; 50.6%) there was a difference in the numbers of males and females participating from across the seven projects. For example, for Aspire 2 (75%, n=27) and An Cosán (87.5%, n=14), there were a majority of female participants (See Table 3.5 and Figure 3.3). In contrast, for iScoil (87.5%, n=7) and Speedpak (100%, n=8) there was a majority of males participating in the survey. For the Cork Life Centre, there was a balance of sexes with 48.5% (n=16) females and 51.5% (n=17) males, a balance replicated albeit to a lesser extent, in the Fast Track Academy and the PETE project.

Table 3.5: Breakdown in the sex of those completing the soft skills questionnaire

NAME OF PROJECT		WHAT IS YOUR SEX?		TOTAL
		FEMALE	MALE	
Aspire 2	Count	27	9	36
	% within Name of Project	75.0%	25.0%	100.0%
	% within What is your Sex?	30.3%	9.9%	20.0%
	% of Total	15.0%	5.0%	20.0%
iScoil	Count	1	7	8
	% within Name of Project	12.5%	87.5%	100.0%
	% within What is your Sex?	1.1%	7.7%	4.4%
	% of Total	0.6%	3.9%	4.4%
Speedpak	Count	0	8	8
	% within Name of Project	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	% within What is your Sex?	0.0%	8.8%	4.4%
	% of Total	0.0%	4.4%	4.4%
Cork Life Centre	Count	16	17	33
	% within Name of Project	48.5%	51.5%	100.0%
	% within What is your Sex?	18.0%	18.7%	18.3%
	% of Total	8.9%	9.4%	18.3%
An Cosán	Count	14	2	16
	% within Name of Project	87.5%	12.5%	100.0%
	% within What is your Sex?	15.7%	2.2%	8.9%
	% of Total	7.8%	1.1%	8.9%
Fast Track Academy	Count	19	28	47
	% within Name of Project	40.4%	59.6%	100.0%
	% within What is your Sex?	21.3%	30.8%	26.1%
	% of Total	10.6%	15.6%	26.1%
PETE	Count	12	20	32
	% within Name of Project	37.5%	62.5%	100.0%
	% within What is your Sex?	13.5%	22.0%	17.8%
	% of Total	6.7%	11.1%	17.8%
TOTAL	Count	89	91	180
	% within Name of Project	49.4%	50.6%	100.0%
	% within What is your Sex?	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	% of Total	49.4%	50.6%	100.0%

Figure 3.3: Breakdown in the sex of those completing the soft skills questionnaire
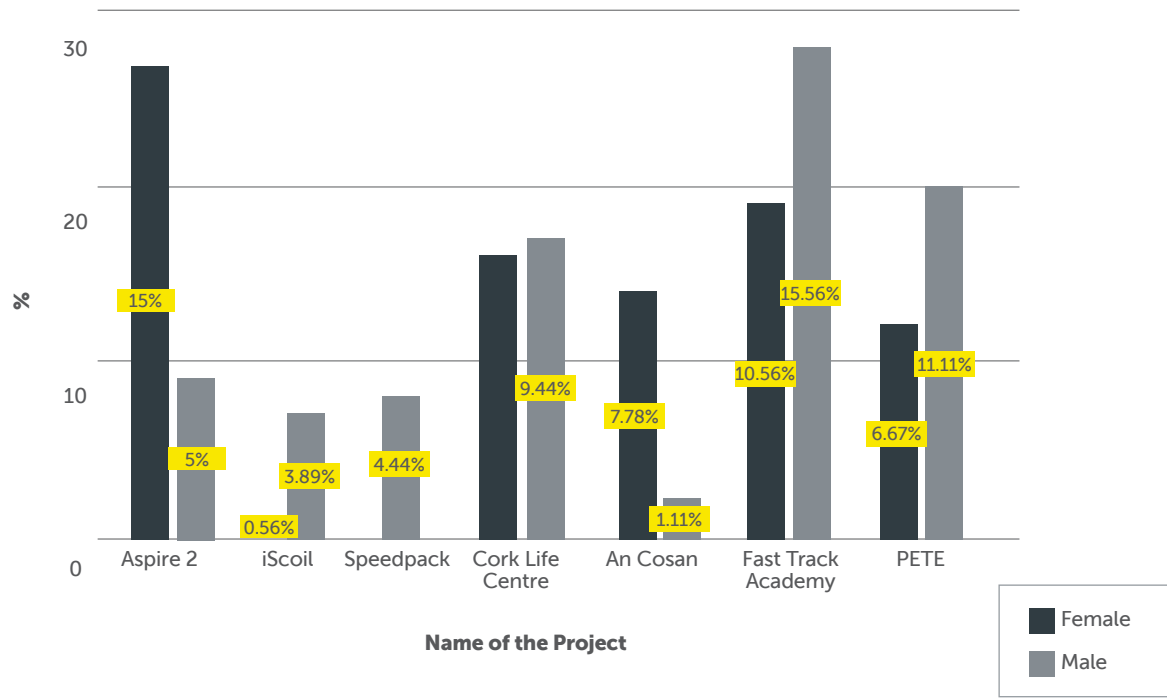
The mean age recorded from participants was 23.5 years (SD = 12.782) with the range of ages found to be 57 years (13 to 70 years old). In further analysis, four new age categories were created; the 13-16 age category to account for participants in the Junior Cycle age bracket; the 17-18 age category for those in Senior Cycle age bracket; the 18-25 age category to capture those in early adulthood and the 26 years plus category to capture all other participants. As shown in Figure 3.4, the largest grouping was the 17-18 age category, accounting for 42.5% (n=77). One quarter of participants fell into the 13-16 age category (25.4%, n= 46) with a further one quarter fitting into the 26+ category (24.3%, n= 44). The 18-25 age category was the smallest grouping (7.7%, n= 14) in the sample.

When these age categories were analysed by project (See Figure 3.5), it revealed that all of the participants from PETE, An Cosán and Speedpak fed solely into the two older age categories (18-25 and 26+ year old). This left iScoil, the Cork Life Centre and the Fast Track Academy working with participants in the youngest category (13-16 Years). For the 17-18 age category, Aspire 2, the Cork Life Centre and the fast Track Academy were the primary providers.

Figure 3.4: Breakdown of ages into four alternative categories
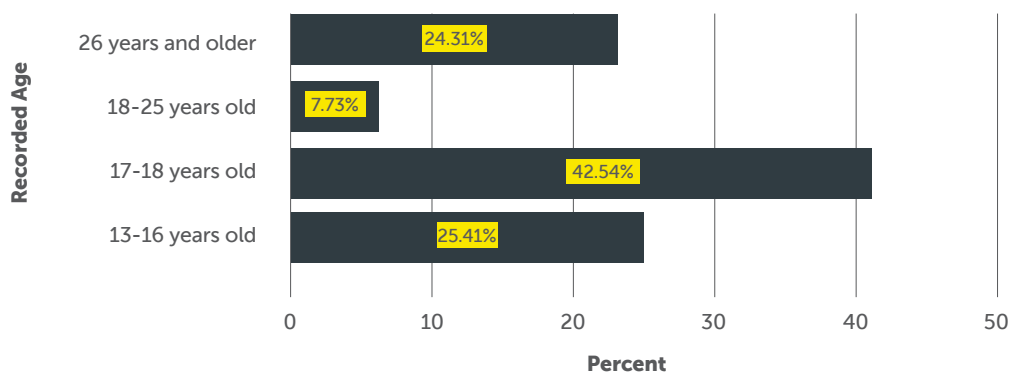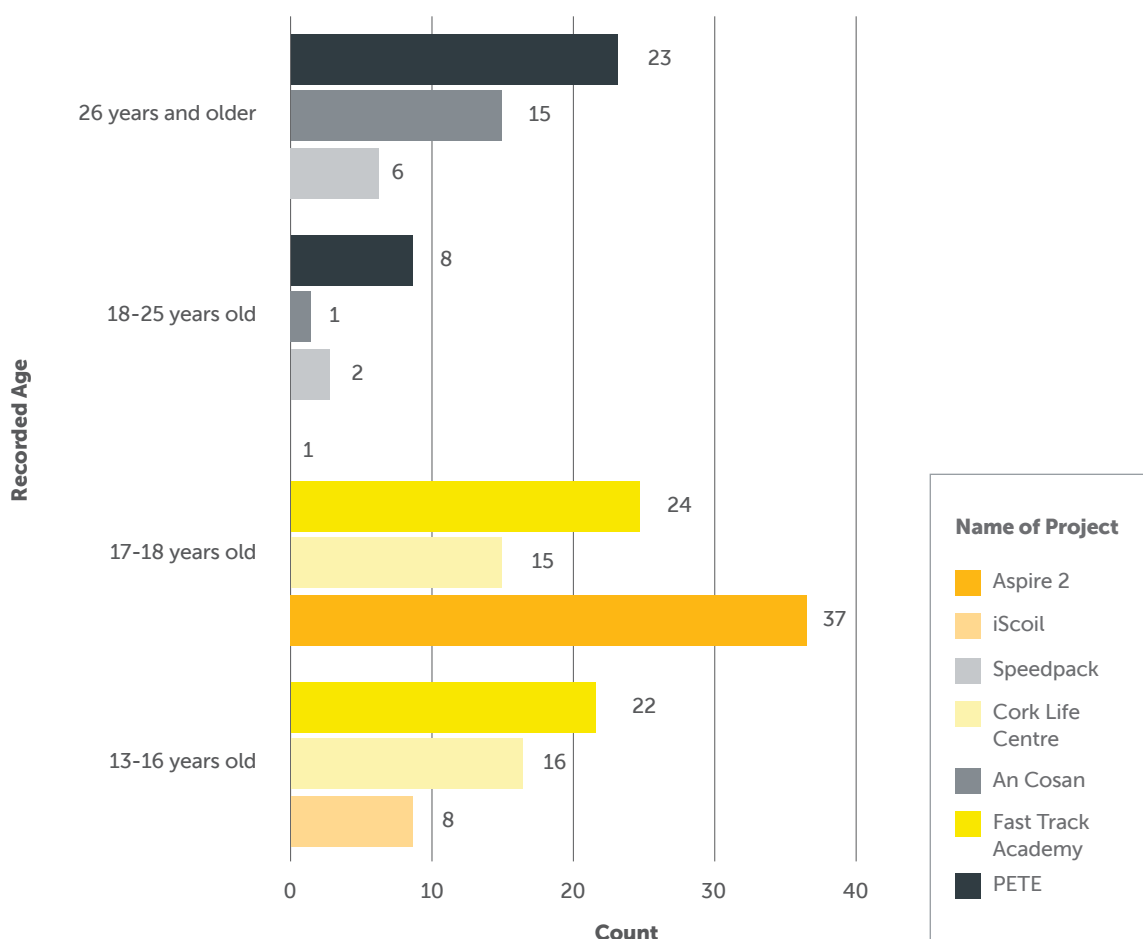

Figure 3.5: Participant age categories by the name of the projects

The final demographic question found that when asked about their nationality, 84.6% (n=154) identified themselves as Irish with 28 (15.4%) identifying themselves as non-Irish.

3.5.3 Analysis of the Soft Skills Data from Time 1

As introduced in Table 3.3 above, the soft skills questionnaire consists of three sections, each measuring specific soft skills, namely personal development skills, social inclusion skills and social and employment skills. The results are presented in two different ways below. Firstly, a brief macro overview of results is presented by the three categories of investigation. Secondly, more detailed results pertaining to these three component areas are provided.

As a point of note, as Time 2 data will not be collected until early summer 2019, the established international norms for each standardised measure, are used below as a way to compare the findings gathered from the SIFI participants.

- **Personal Development Skills** – Two thirds of respondents had normal levels of self- esteem (Rosenberg Scale), while 17% were below the average. For well-being (PERMA Scale), participants' total scores were slightly higher for as compared to the norm. Specifically, their scores were also higher for one of the sub-scales of 'engagement and relationships'. However, well-being as related to the sub-scale of their 'accomplishments' was lower than the norm. In terms of resilience (CYRM-28), participants' overall level was slightly lower than the norm, particularly in terms of peer support and psychological caregiving. Nevertheless, average resilience levels for participants relating to education and personal skills were higher for them than the norm.

- **Social Inclusion Skills** – Participants average scores were on par with established norms relating to academic engagement, while their sense of belonging

and self-confidence was slightly lower than the norm. In terms of inclusion, more than 90% of participants stated that they enjoyed attending their respective SIFI project.

- **Social and Employment Skills** - More than 90% of participants stated that their respective projects were helping them improve their self-confidence, become a well-balanced person and acquire new skills.

More detailed results relating to each of the three areas are presented below.

Personal Development Skills

The section on personal development skills included three measures, which collected data on participant levels of self-esteem, well-being and resilience.

Participants Self-esteem

Participants' self esteem was measured using a 10 item, four point Likert Scale ranging from *'strongly agree'* to *'strongly disagree'*. The Scale used was developed by Rosenberg in the 1960s and has widely used in international research with children and adults since then. The Scale measures global self-worth by capturing both positive and negative feelings about the self.

In terms of results, it is possible for participants to achieve a score between 0-30. Analysis found that 68.4% (n=93) of participants were in the normal range, achieving a score between 15 and 25 (See Table 3.6) with 14.7% (n=20) achieving an above average score of between 26-30. Therefore, in cumulative terms 83% of participants either scored within the normal range or above. At the lower end of the scale, 16.9% (n=23) of participants fell into this category achieving a score of between 0-14.

Table 3.6: Categorisation of Rosenberg's self-esteem scores

	FREQUENCY	VALID PERCENT
Below average (0-14)	23	16.9
Normal range (15-25)	93	68.4
Above average (26-30)	20	14.7
Total	136	100.0

Participants' Well-being

In his 2011 work, Seligman defined five pillars of well-being and introduced the PERMA-Profiler as a way to measure these constructs. The profiler consists of 23 items across five pillars, and includes additional contextual questions on health, negative emotion, loneliness and overall happiness.

The five pillars are as follows:

- **P**ositive and negative emotions – The PERMA profiler measures participants' positive feelings of contentment and joy as well as negative feelings like sadness, anxiousness or being angry.

- **E**ngagement – The profiler measures the extent to which participants are absorbed, interested and involved in an activity.

- **R**elationships – The profiler measures the extent of feelings of being loved, supported and valued by others.

- **M**eaning – The profiler measures the extent to which participants have a purpose in life, whether they feel life is valuable and worth living and if they have a religious faith.

- **A**ccomplishment – The profiler measures the extent of the feelings of accomplishment of goals in daily activities.

Table 3.7 presents the results relating to the PERMA-Profiler. The Table shows the number of valid responses for each item, the mean, median and standard deviation scores achieved by participants and the PERMA-Profiler mean and median norms for each sub-domain area. The overall score for well-being consists of a combination of the mean scores for each of the sub-domains plus the happiness variable. Table 3.7 shows that participants achieved a mean score of 7.06 overall, which is slightly above the PERMA-Profiler norms. Participants' mean scores for their levels of Engagement (7.50) and their Relationships (7.21) were also slightly higher than the average for the Profiler. The remaining three sub-domain areas of Positive emotion (6.72), Meaning (6.95) and Accomplishment (6.86), show that participants' mean scores in these areas were slightly lower than the PERMA-Profiler norms.

Table 3.7: Mean scores for the PERMA - Profiler

CATEGORY	N	MEAN SCORE FOR SIFI PROJECTS	MEAN NORMS PERMA PROFILER	MEDIAN FOR SIFI PROJECTS	MEDIAN NORMS PERMA PROFILER	SD - SIFI
Positive emotion (P)	168	6.72	6.69	7.00	7.00	1.84
Engagement (E)	174	7.50	7.25	7.66	7.67	1.45
Relationships (R)	170	7.21	6.90	7.33	7.33	1.77
Meaning (M)	137	6.95	7.06	7.33	7.67	1.81
Accomplishment (A)	175	6.86	7.21	7.00	7.67	1.48
Overall Well-being	128	7.06	7.02	7.33	7.38	1.46

Participants' Resilience

"It is now widely accepted that resilience is the capacity of individuals to overcome adversity and do well in spite of exposure to significant adversity" (Liebenberg at al, 2012: 219). Considering this, participants were asked to complete the Child and Youth Resilience Measure (CYRM-28) which is a 28-item measure, on a five point rating scale from '*does not describe me at all*' to '*describes me a lot*'. The Scale was developed to provide a more inclusive understanding of resilience across cultures and contexts.

The measure has three sub-scales, which reflect the major categories of resilience. The first subscale is about the *'individual'* and includes personal skills (5 items), peer support (2 items), and social skills (4 items). The second subscale is 'caregiving', including physical caregiving (2 items) and psychological caregiving (5 items). The third subscale measures *'context'* that facilitate a sense of belonging in youth, particularly spirituality (3 items), culture (5 items) and education (2 items). The maximum score possible is 140 while the lowest score attainable is 28.

The mean score achieved by SIFI participants was 109

(SD = 15.82), while the mean score established for the CYRM-28 measure is 111. Therefore, whilst slightly below the established norms, the SIFI participants compare favourably. As shown in Table 3.8, the CYRM-28 is divided into three sub-scales. Data on the participants from the SIFI projects showed that they had minimally higher levels of resilience in the form of personal skills and education as compared to the norms for the CYRM-28. Participants recorded lower mean scores on all of the other sub-scales as compared to the CYRM-28 norms. The largest discrepancy in this regard was found in the psychological caregiving scale.

Table 3.8: Breakdown of CYRM-28 compared to SIFI by mean scores for each sub-scale

SUB-SCALE	MEDIAN FOR SIFI PROJECTS	MEDIAN NORMS PERMA PROFILER	SD - SIFI
Individual	Personal Skills	M = 4.05, SD = .629	M = 4.00, SD = .61
	Peer Support	M = 3.90, SD = .995	M = 4.13, SD = .946
	Social Skills	M = 4.12, SD = .828	M = 4.16, SD = .714
Caregiver	Physical Caregiving	M = 4.11, SD = .912	M = 4.22, SD = .842
	Psychological Caregiving	M = 3.90, SD = .822	M = 4.03, SD = .907
Context	Spiritual	M = 2.79, SD = .956	M = 2.88, SD = 1.102
	Educational	M = 4.25, SD = .742	M = 4.10, SD = .967
	Cultural	M = 4.03, SD = .718	M = 4.14, SD = .738

Social Inclusion Skills

Following on from the *personal development skills,* the second component in the soft skills questionnaire sought data relating to the social inclusion skills of participants. This involved using measures focussing on constructs such as belonging, engagement and self-confidence.

Belonging, Engagement and Self-Confidence

A person's sense of belonging and their engagement in academic study have been identified as key contributors to student success (Yorke, 2016: 154). Yorke developed a

three-component scale to explore students' perceptions of belonging, academic engagement and self-confidence. The scale consists of 16 items and invites responses on a five-point Likert scale ranging from *'strongly agree'* to *'strongly disagree'*.

Analysis of the soft skills data (See Table 3.9) revealed that participants compared favourably with the norms established by Yorke (2014), relating to the nature of their academic engagement. However, participants' sense of belonging was below the Yorke mean score, as was their level of self-confidence.

Table 3.9: Mean scores for the Yorke measure on belongingness, engagement and self-confidence

SCALE	N	MEAN SCORE FOR SIFI PROJECTS	MEAN NORMS FOR YORKE MEASURE (2014)	SD - SIFI
Belongingness Scale	167	3.44	4.02	0.29
Engagement Scale	179	3.78	3.77	0.60
Self-Confidence Scale	179	3.27	3.51	0.48

Participants Active Engagement

The questionnaire also contained a set of items developed by the Quaglia Institute in the US, on student aspirations. In Table 3.10, the results showing the extent to which participants were *'actively engaged'* in their respective projects are presented. A cumulative total of 94.4% (n= 168) of participants either *'strongly agreed'/'agree'* that they enjoyed attending their respective programme, while 88% (n= 155) *'strongly agreed'/ 'agreed'* that they liked learning new things in their programmes.

Table 3.10: Extent to which participants actively engaged

ITEM	STRONGLY AGREE N=&(%)	AGREE N=&(%)	NEUTRAL N=&(%)	DISAGREE N=&(%)	STRONGLY DISAGREE N=&(%)	TOTAL N=&(%)
1. I enjoy being at this programme	85 (47.8)	83 (46.6)	9 (5.1)	0	1 (0.6)	178 (100)
2. I like challenging assignments	46 (25.8)	67 (37.6)	45 (25.3)	14 (7.9)	6 (3.4)	178 (100)
3. This programme is boring	4 (2.3)	8 (4.5)	16 (9.1)	63 (35.8)	85 (48.3)	176 (100)
4. I enjoy participating in my class	71 (39.9)	83 (46.6)	19 (10.7)	4 (2.2)	1 (0.6)	178 (100)
5. I enjoy learning new things	84 (47.7)	71 (40.3)	21 (11.9)	0	0	176 (100)
6. I learn new things that are interesting to me at this project	69 (38.5)	78 (43.6)	25 (14.0)	5 (2.8)	2 (1.1)	179 (100)
7. Learning can be fun	62 (34.6)	76 (42.5)	33 (18.4)	6 (3.4)	2 (1.1)	179 (100)

Social and Employment Skills

Following on from the *personal development* and *social inclusion skills* as discussed above, the soft skills questionnaire contained a third component which sought data on the *social and employment skills* of participants. This involved using measures focussing on the perceived benefits of their programme and skills regarded as useful for work and life in general.

Benefits of this Programme

Adapting a set of questions from the Growing-up in Ireland Study (2018), the soft skills questionnaire asked participants to consider the benefit of their programme to them in areas such as making friends, developing new skills or building confidence. The key findings are as follows (See Table 3.11):

- A cumulative total of 93.8% (n = 166) of participants said ('yes a lot' / 'yes some') that the programme was helping them increase their *self-confidence*

- A total of 96.6% (n = 170) of participants said ('yes a lot' / 'yes some') that the programme was helping them develop into a *well-balanced person.*

- A total of 94.9% (n=167) of participants said ('yes a lot' /' yes some') that the programme was helping them in *find out about themselves.*

- A cumulative total of 93.1% (n=163) of participants said ('yes a lot' / 'yes some') that their programme was helping them *acquire a new skills.*

Table 3.11: Perceived benefits of the various Awardee programmes on participants

ITEM	YES, A LOT % (N=)	YES, SOME % (N=)	NO HELP % (N=)	TOTAL % (N=)
1. In increasing your self-confidence.	40.7 (72)	53.1 (94)	6.2 (11)	100 (177)
2. In helping you develop into a well-balanced person.	44.9 (79)	51.7 (91)	3.4 (6)	100 (176)
3. In building good relations with friends of the opposite sex.	34.7 (60)	49.7 (86)	15.6 (27)	100 (173)
4. In being able to talk and communicate with others.	59.9 (106)	35.6 (63)	4.5 (8)	100 (177)
5. In knowing how to go about finding things out for yourself.	55.7 (98)	39.2 (69)	5.1 (9)	100 (176)
6. In helping you to make new friends.	48.3 (85)	42.6 (75)	9.1 (16)	100 (176)
7. In knowing how to acquire a new skill.	57.7 (101)	35.4 (62)	6.9 (12)	100 (175)
8. In getting involved in sports.	17.1 (30)	32.6 (57)	50.3 (88)	100 (175)
9. In giving you reading and writing skills.	41.2 (73)	42.9 (76)	15.8 (28)	100 (177)
10. In appreciating reading for pleasure.	26.9 (47)	39.4 (69)	33.7 (59)	100 (175)
11. In preparing you for the world of work.	47.5 (84)	42.9 (76)	9.6 (17)	100 (177)
12. In giving you computer skills.	39.5 (70)	29.4 (52)	31.1 (55)	100 (177)
13. In preparing you for adult life.	44.9 (79)	38.1 (67)	17.0 (30)	100 (176)
14. In helping you to think for yourself.	53.4 (93)	39.1 (68)	7.5 (13)	100 (174)
15. In appreciating art or music.	30.9 (54)	38.9 (68)	30.3 (53)	100 (175)
16. In helping you to decide what to do after you leave the school.	45.5 (80)	43.8 (77)	10.8 (19)	100 (176)

The final set of questions asked participants to state how confident they felt in carrying out specific tasks, deemed necessary for work and for general life. The highlights are as follows (See Table 3.12):

- A total of 72.8% (n= 126) of the sample said they would be 'confident' / 'very confident' to work in pairs or small groups to complete a task, with just over one fifth (21.4%, n=37) unsure.

- Just over two thirds (67.6%, n= 107) of participants said they would be 'confident'/ 'very confident' in communicating their ideas using media other than a written paper. Approximately 1 in 10 (9.8%) stating they were not at all confident / not very confident in the task.

Table 3.12: Skills perceived by participants to be useful for them in work and life in general

ITEMS	NOT AT ALL CONFIDENT % (N=)	NOT VERY CONFIDENT % (N=)	NEUTRAL % (N=)	CONFIDENT % (N=)	VERY CONFIDENT % (N=)	TOTAL % (N=)
1. Work in pairs or small groups to complete a task together	-	5.8 (10)	21.4 (37)	49.1 (85)	23.7 (41)	173 (100)
2. Work with other students to set goals and create a plan for your team.	-	5.2 (9)	20.8 (36)	54.3 (94)	19.7 (34)	173 (100)

Table 3.12: Skills perceived by participants to be useful for them in work and life in general (continued)

ITEMS	NOT AT ALL CONFIDENT % (N=)	NOT VERY CONFIDENT % (N=)	NEUTRAL % (N=)	CONFIDENT % (N=)	VERY CONFIDENT % (N=)	TOTAL % (N=)
3. Create joint products using contribtutions from each student.	-	5.3 (9)	29.8 (51)	46.2 (79)	18.7 (32)	171 (100)
4. Communicate your ideas using media other than a written paper (e.g. posters, video, blogs, etc.).	2.9 (5)	6.9 (12)	22.5 (39)	42.2 (73)	25.4 (44)	173 (100)
5. Prepare and deliver an oral presentation to the teacher or others.	9.2 (16)	13.2 (23)	31 (54)	28.2 (49)	18.4 (32)	174 (100)
6. Answer questions in front of an audience.	11.0 (19)	15.7 (27)	21.5 (37)	31.4 (54)	20.3 (35)	172 (100)
7. Test out ideas and work to improve them.	1.2 (2)	1.8 (3)	26.5 (45)	48.2 (82)	22.4 (38)	170 (100)
8. Invent a solution to difficult problems.	1.7 (3)	5.2 (9)	28.5 (49)	45.3 (78)	19.2 (33)	172 (100)
9. Create something new that can help you express your ideas.	2.3 (4)	3.5 (6)	34.1 (59)	42.8(74)	17.3 (30)	173 (100)

The concept and implementation of a set of tools to measure soft skills specific to the Education Fund has been both an innovative and novel approach in the Irish and international context. The data collected at Time 1 will be supplemented by the Time 2 data (May 2019) and will provide a longitudinal understanding of soft skills development. At that point the evaluators will complete a full comparative analysis of the change over time of mean scores for participants across each domain area, structuring it by cluster and project. This data will then be fed back to projects to enable them to build the necessary learning into their planning for the next iteration of their project. Over the summer of 2019, the evaluators will also consult with projects to hear their views on the usefulness and any difficulties encountered in administering the soft skills questionnaire. Any suggested amendments will be reviewed and adopted where possible for the next iteration of the data collection process, due to occur in late September 2019.

3.6. Conclusion

This section presented some early data findings by addressing some of the questions from the evaluation framework. A total of 10 participants' vignettes were presented to provide an insight into the learners' lives and their experiences with the projects. A description of the project models were then presented to shed the light on the their visions, aims and missions, and activities that the Awardees follow in their work. Similarities and differences across the projects were documented further through the clustering process. Three clusters of projects were identified to share learning specific to their focus. The last section discussed the process of designing and implementing the soft skills questionnaire and presented some early data from the Time 1 collection process. The next section presents key developments and challenges of the Irish mainstream education system. These challenges are in many cases addressed by the SIFI Awardees who in comparison use alternative approaches of learning at their work. What is alternative in education is addressed after that.

04

FORMAL AND ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION – A CONTEXTUAL OVERVIEW

4.1 Introduction

This section consists of two interrelated elements. Section 4.2 focuses on the Irish Education system since Independence, right through to the review of the DEIS programme in 2017. After defining alternative education, Section 4.3 reviews the nature of alternative educational provision from an international perspective.

4.2 The Irish Education System

4.2.1 Historical Developments in the Irish Education System

This short overview presents the main developments in the Irish education system since Independence. It identifies four defining phases and shows how the system has responded to societal and individual needs. It considers the impact of wider societal norms and international organisations (e.g., OECD, EU) on education in Ireland. It also considers how educational inequality influences future students' opportunities and outcomes in life. Finally, it outlines some key positive trends and challenges in the current education system.

4.2.2 Phase One: Theocentric Approach to Education

In the years after the state independence, education was considered as a mean of cultural preservation reinforcing nationalist and Catholic values.

Prior to the OECD 'Investment in Education' report (1965), the Irish education system was a theocentric paradigm (O'Sullivan, 2005), a mechanism whereby Catholic values were transmitted and reinforced since the foundation of the Irish State. As a result of centuries of cultural control, a strong focus was placed upon all things nationally and culturally Irish. This included history, religion, geography, and Irish literature, which had all been prohibited before Independence. Similarly to most European mass school systems at the time, education was not regarded as a means of giving children the opportunity to discover their strengths and weaknesses; nor was it a method of streaming one's creativity or self-discovery: it was a means of cultural preservation (Garvin, 2004).

The Irish education system was largely aligned with the idea that education is related to community rather than the individual (Russell, 2010), whereby religion served as a way of reinforcing nationalist and Catholic values (Garvin, 2004). Garvin (2004: 158) argues that 'the Catholic Church effectively controlled education and decided what education should consist of, subject to the new, hungry and ambitious Catholic middle class'. In modern society, these principles differ. With more secular movements and more pluralistic approaches to public life in contemporary Ireland, it is no longer regarded as important for schools to promote nationalism or religious teachings from this perspective. Education now instils a new set of values centred on filling the needs of the modern industrial world (O'Sullivan, 2005; Coolahan et al., 2017).

4.2.3 Phase Two: OECD Investment in Education Report

The 'Investment in Education' report (OECD, 1965) is regarded as the foundation of the modern Irish education system (Coolahan, 1981: 165). It was motivated by the need for a supply of technically skilled and higher-educated graduates to fulfil the demands of the rapid industrial development of the 1960s. The report suggested that a wider spectrum of subjects was needed to offer pupils a more diverse skill set that were more suited to the needs of industry. Less emphasis was to be placed upon traditional literature and languages; for example, Latin was replaced by European languages, and modern literature was to be added to the curriculum. Subjects of the humanities, including history and geography, were to become more varied in their contents. This period saw the introduction of subjects such as metalwork, woodwork, accountancy, business, music, and home economics to the second-level curriculum. In a broader context, it is clear that the introduction of mass schooling was also motivated by a desire for social transformation and to provide greater opportunities for the lower socio-economic classes (Taylor et al., 1997: 100–126). However, as pointed out by O'Connor (2014), the nature of public investment in education has been ignored in succeeding years and decades.

Free comprehensive education system for all was introduced to provide labour for the industrialising Irish economy.

This change was not so much a paradigm shift as a paradigm confrontation, as this commercial view of education delivery could not have been more alien to a nation where education's primary purpose was to produce 'pious patriots' (Garvin, 2004: 203–214). Education was now considered to be 'careerist' (O'Sullivan, 2005: 125–127), and the curriculum was concerned with channelling children into career paths.

The 'Investment in Education' report changed education delivery in a number of ways. The most significant change was the introduction of a free comprehensive education system, which no longer put in place access barriers to those from poorer backgrounds. Combating early school leaving (ESL) was a key element discussed, coupled with raising the school-leaving age from 14 to 16 to make it possible to gain practical skills for the workplace (Taighde ar Oideachas, 1965: 466). The report stated that the number of pupils leaving school without reaching primary-level education needed to be decreased, and it suggested that increased provision of schools and a grant or scholarship system would help in tackling drop-out rates. Improvements were also sought in the number of children from lower-skilled and unskilled social groups who enter post-primary education. Children from social backgrounds A, B, and C (farmers, professional, senior employees, and clerks) were shown to have five times greater chance of participating in post-primary education than children from categories D, E, and F (skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled) (Coolahan, 1981: 166).

The introduction of this system was complemented by the introduction of community schools and a transport system, so rural communities were included in these radical new policy interventions (Garvin, 2004: 201).

4.2.4 Phase Three: Policy Responses to Educational Inequalities

Up until 1990, little policy change occurred in the education sector since the significant changes that followed the 'Investment in Education' report (1965). The 1990s, however, witnessed a number of factors that contributed to greater societal awareness and a more proactive level of State intervention. According to the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE, 2005), this was attributed to Ireland's ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1992), culminating with the nation's improved economic situation. As a result, the last two decades have seen the introduction of myriad initiatives designed to target a broad range of problems in the education system, ranging from preschool to adult education. Key educational policies are listed below.

Major policy initiatives in education have been introduced since the 1990s.

(a) 1992 Green Paper for Education, 'Education for a Changing World'

The 1992 Green Paper placed a significant emphasis on education serving the needs of industry, aiming to create an environment which equips pupils for life and work in an enterprise culture and for citizen participation in Europe (DES, 1995). It proposed to restructure the education system by devolving the bureaucratic powers from the Department of Education to local executive committees comprising school staff, management, and parental representatives.

The 1992 Green Paper received praise in many respects for having a primary focus upon reducing disadvantage in schooling. The Combat Poverty Agency (CPA) (1993) welcomed the aim of establishing greater equity in the education system, but it also suggested that the Green Paper ignored the various significances and purposes that education has for different people. CPA (1993), while satisfied that inequalities formed a major focus in the Green Paper, also expressed disappointment that it did not specifically discuss early school leaving, its causes and consequences. Furthermore, it failed to intimate which mechanism is proposed for transmitting core values though the education system. However, the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO)[5] welcomed the new approach, which encompassed a holistic emphasis on religious, social, health, and physical education.

(b) The 1995 White Paper on Education, 'Charting Our Education Future'

The 1995 White Paper on Education, titled 'Charting Our Education Future', followed the Green Paper (1992). It outlined key objectives to provide additional empowerment and policy direction for all partners in education. In the policy framework, this Paper allowed for more flexibility in meeting particular needs and for the respect of legitimate rights and responsibilities among education partners at all levels. In this vein, it formulated a clearer definition of the role of the Minister and the DES in policy provision (DES, 1995).

The White Paper contained policy proposals for equality

[5] The Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO), which was founded in 1868, is the largest teachers' trade union in Ireland. It represents teachers at primary level in the Republic of Ireland, and at primary and post-primary level in Northern Ireland.

that aimed to achieve greater access to supports for disadvantaged schools. However, it neglected to specify how this would be operationalised. The White Paper emphasised the responsibility that parents have for the cognitive development of their children by referring to Article 42.1 of the Constitution,[6] but it did not reference any supports to enable parents to play a greater role in the actual learning process of their children. Other than a brief mention of the Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) programme in Chapter Nine, the document did not specifically engage with the issue of disadvantage in an in-depth manner (DES, 1995).

The Green and White Papers culminated in the creation of the Education Act (1998). The Act provided for the introduction of new measures and required that both schools and the DES put them in place. It placed an obligation on the DES to provide statements on the various roles that inspectorate, schools, principals, and teachers should fulfil. The Act obliges the State to provide an education to every person, placing an impetus on inclusivity, and requires the education system to promote partnerships between schools, patron, students, teachers, and the broader community (Education Act, 1998: 5).

(c) The Education Welfare Act (2000) and the DEIS Programme (2005)

A further change in response can be clearly observed in the Education Welfare Act (2000). Similarly to the White Paper, the Act dedicates much of its content to clearly defining structures and functions of the departments, agencies, and personnel. As for the child-centred aspects of this legislation, the central thrust relates to the importance of minimising truancy and poor attendance. The Education Welfare Act presents the legislative framework for compulsory school attendance by providing a minimum standard of education based upon a school leaving age of 16 years or the completion of three years of post-primary education. The Act also provides for the introduction of regulated alternative education to encompass home schooling, and the establishment of an Educational Welfare Board (EWB). Consequently, the EWB currently promotes the educational welfare of children and provides standard procedures governing school attendance and expulsion (Education Welfare Act, 2000). Following on from the Child and Family Agency Act (2013), the functions of the National Educational Welfare Board were transferred to the Educational Welfare Services operated under the new Child and Family Agency (Tusla).

The DEIS programme was introduced in 2005 and had two main aims. The first was to create a standardised

system whereby levels of disadvantage could be more easily identified and reviewed. Secondly it created a new integrated School Support Programme (SSP) designed to bolster and unite existing interventions for school clusters and communities with high levels of social and economic disadvantage (DES, 2005: 9). DEIS was created with the aim of integrating existing initiatives, including the HSCL scheme. As well as operating on a continuum of measures to tackle disadvantage, DEIS policy is grounded on the belief that every child and young person deserves an equal chance to access, participate in, and benefit from the education system, and it claims that education is a critical factor in promoting social inclusion and economic development (DES, 2005: 15).

The DEIS action plan was devised using a new procedure that identifies disadvantaged schools and deploys a number of distributed educational supports based on each school's need. Weir (2006) suggests that the schools considered for inclusion in DEIS were initially chosen based on information provided by principals. An index is used to evaluate which schools qualify for extra recourses under DEIS. This requires schools to show evidence of experiencing educational problems such as below-average retention or poor junior cycle performance, as well an above-average enrolment of students from poor socio-economic backgrounds (Weir, 2006: 1). In addition, the index must contain at least one socio-economic variable such as the percentage of medical cards held in the school's catchment area and the percentile of students in receipt of a grant for free school books (Weir, 2006: 1–2).

To tackle the challenges faced as a result of disadvantage, pupil–teacher ratios are reduced in Urban Band 1 schools, which are schools that have the greatest proportion of disadvantaged children. Greater access to the HSCL was made available, with 80 new coordinators employed by 2006, and the School Completion Programme (SCP) was rolled out to all DEIS schools that did not already have it. Additional funding was made available, with €500,000 provided under the School Books Grant Scheme to support DEIS schools, €1m additional capitation to 670 DEIS primary schools, and €1m additional capitation to 203 DEIS post-primary schools (DES, 2006: 28). Greater access was extended to a range of professional supports, together with access to the School Meals Programme and access for all DEIS schools to literacy and numeracy programmes. Professional support is provided for their implementation (Smyth et al., 2015: 8).

The need for clarity and a more unified method of service delivery, as recommended by the Educational Disadvantage Committee (2005), is evident in the structure and purpose of DEIS. The HSCL does

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[6] The State acknowledges that the primary and natural educator of the child is the family, and guarantees to respect the inalienable right and duty of parents to provide, according to their means, for the religious and moral, intellectual, physical, and social education of their children (Bunreacht na hÉireann, Art. 42.1).

not operate as a standalone policy and relies on the cooperation of other initiatives, including SCP. It provides an effective link between supports both internal to and outside of the school environment, parents, and the broader community (DES, 2005: 57)

The DEIS Programme (2005) was introduced to provide supports to schools with high concentrations of students from disadvantaged backgrounds (Weir and Kavanagh, 2018: 2).

The DEIS Plan 2017 has replaced the Action Plan 2005 with an idea to further improve the programme by following these targets: (1) increasing reading literacy in DEIS schools; (2) achieving higher performing rates in mathematics; (3) improving retention rates at second level in DEIS schools from 82.7% to 90.2% by 2025; (4) improving students' well-being by extending the Incredible Years teacher programme in DEIS primary schools; (5) increasing the number of young people from DEIS schools in further and higher education; (6) enhancing teacher education and professional development programmes to support raising students' expectations in relation to their higher-education potential; (7) improving parents' engagement in schools; and (8) improving DEIS schools' links with business and wider communities (DES, 2017: 6–8).

The DEIS school support programme has been effective in delivering literacy and numeracy programmes and financing smaller classes in disadvantaged schools. A whole-school approach has been adapted to addressed issues faced by the DEIS schools. This approach encompasses a whole range of actors, including school staff, principals, learners, their families, and other community and business stakeholders involved in supporting the school and learners' work (DES, 2017: 9) (see Appendix 3). Despite these positive outcomes, performance in DEIS schools continues to remain below the national average. In comparison with students attending non-DEIS schools, students attending DEIS schools are still less likely to complete secondary education and participate in higher education (McCoy and Byrne, 2011).

4.2.5 Phase Four: Expansion of the Educational System Amidst Persistent Patterns of Educational Disadvantage and Poverty

The Irish state has played a significant role in expanding

the educational system and providing mass expansion of higher education in the 1990s and 2000s (Byrne and McCoy, 2017). As argued by Nolan et al. (2014), the state went through 'educational revolution' since the introduction of free compulsory schooling in the 1960s. Yet this expansion has not resulted in any significant reduction of social-class inequalities. For example, research shows that parental social class has a major impact on students' progress in education (Byrne and McCoy, 2017: 59). Students from less-advantaged backgrounds are less likely to continue with upper secondary-level education or beyond. Social-class division also proves prominent at higher-education level, with a clear division between students from high socio-economic backgrounds attending universities, and students from low socio-economic backgrounds attending an institute of technology or college (Byrne and McCoy, 2017: 65).

The Education Act (1998, Section 32: 9) defines educational disadvantage as the 'impediments to education arising from social or economic disadvantage which prevents students from deriving appropriate benefit from education'. Evidence suggests that income poverty affects the quality of the home environment. This is significant, as it is the home environment that influences many aspects of children's development, including their cognitive, verbal, scholastic, and socio-emotional functioning (Kellaghan, 2001: 13). The effects of material deprivation must also be considered, which include the lack of access to educational supports and extracurricular activities, and the lack of financial assets and physical assets such as books, computers, and other equipment to stimulate learning (Feinstein et al., 2004: 70).

Educational disadvantage needs to be viewed within the wider social stratification in society, in the context of 'the logistics of capitalism and the structure of welfare state' (Byrne and McCoy, 2017: 52). There is a strong established correlation between income inequalities and educational disadvantage in an Irish context. Those with higher qualifications earn, on average, greater sums over a lifetime than those with poor or no qualifications (SJI, 2016: 178). This widely recognised relationship between education and the reproduction of inequalities related to social class is expressed by Gray and O'Carroll (2012: 3), who suggest that educational achievement continues to be a key mechanism in the transmission of disadvantage between generations. Barnardos (2009: 4) explain that children's life chances remain disproportionately affected by their families' social and economic positions in Irish society. As a result, some children continue to face stark inequalities of both opportunity and educational outcome. Such children have a greater probability of having difficulties in areas such as literacy and numeracy. They are more likely to leave school prematurely and are

thereby less likely to transfer on to further and higher education. Others find it difficult to gain unskilled employment due to not having completed the Leaving Certificate (Barnardos, 2009: 4). Despite several positive outcomes, school completion continues to be associated with those from higher professional backgrounds (Byrne and McCoy, 2017).

The European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) Ireland (no date) states that the percentage of Irish people living in consistent poverty doubled from 2008 to 2016, rising from 4.2% to 8.3%. The consistent poverty rate for the unemployed rose from 9.7% in 2008 to 25.2% in 2016. Children remain the most vulnerable group, with 11.5% living in consistent poverty. These statistics highlight the relevance of this study, as it holds that education can contribute to reducing long-term poverty and thereby enhance the well-being of society (DES, 2005: 11). EAPN Ireland (no date) states that those who leave school without completing the Leaving Cert are 21.8% more at risk of being in consistent poverty than those who do not leave school early.

4.2.5.1 Students' Educational Outcomes and Inequality

Since the 1990s, disadvantage and its relationship to pupil retention have formed the basis for many of the initiatives to tackle educational disadvantage. A significant challenge that schools encounter in disadvantaged communities is that of early school leaving – pupils leaving before completing the Leaving Cert.[7] A central tenet of the HSCL is to address this issue, with an aim to encourage regular attendance and retain students until the upper-secondary cycle is completed. DES (2016) statistics highlight that of a total cohort of 261,831 registered students, 7,572 exited the education system before completing the Leaving Cert. Smyth et al. (2015) find that at both junior and senior cycles, the presence of supports and initiatives to tackle disadvantage has a positive impact on early school leaving.

Despite such strategies, more children from lower socio-economic backgrounds leave school early. The figures, however, do not indicate that all school leavers exit the education system. Many transfer to other education and training programmes, leaving only 6.6% of early school leavers reliant on social welfare. However, in relation to the area of concern for this study, it is interesting to note that the highest level of ESLs are pupils from DEIS schools.[8] DEIS policies incorporate the HSCL among

other initiatives, including the Schools Completion Programme (SCP), literacy and numeracy supports, and additional community supports to encourage greater participation and retention.

Byrne and Smyth (2010: 48) report that early school leaving (ESL) is most visible among lower socio-economic groups and in particular among males. The participants of their study provided various reasons for their choice to leave school before completing the Leaving Cert. Some experienced disengagement from the system; some felt that the academic struggle was too great and found it difficult to keep up with rest of the class. Others reported having poor relationships with teachers, who they believed did not listen to them. The main reasons for ESL included a lack of encouragement by the school, a rejection of school due to a dislike of the rules, issues with teachers and other students, feelings of underachievement, the pull of labour market opportunities, personal issues, or a combination of these variables (Byrne and Smyth, 2010: 69–96). As Barnardos (2009) argue, early school leavers are four times more likely to be unemployed than their highly educated peers (Barnardos, 2009: 7). They are more likely to describe their health as poor or fair, more likely to experience restrictions in their work as a result of a long-term illness or disability, more likely to suffer with mental illness, and more likely to have a medical card (Barnardos, 2009: 11). Such findings reinforce the close links that education has with poverty, as early school leavers are often excluded from the labour market and from broader participation in society.

While ESL and pupil–teacher ratios remain a challenge in Ireland, UNICEF's (2018) Innocenti Report Card suggests that Ireland is performing well internationally on educational equality. The report focuses on educational inequalities in 41 of the world's richest countries, all of which are members of the OECD. The Innocenti Report Card examines inequalities across childhood, from access to preschool to expectations of post-secondary education. In terms of the widest gaps in reading comprehension at primary school, between children from professional and non-professional socio-economic backgrounds, Ireland sits approximately halfway on the table. Inequalities between children arise not only as a result of family backgrounds but also of schools attended. Although in Ireland, large gaps remain in reading comprehension, variation in reading levels among schools is low (UNICEF, 2018: 22).

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[7] The final examination in the Irish Education system, which takes a minimum of two years to complete. Participation in the Leaving Cert is not compulsory.

[8] DEIS initiative, introduced in 2005 in schools with high concentrations of disadvantaged pupils. It combines a range of additional educational supports to tackle educational disadvantage (for a detailed explanation, see Section 2.8).

UNICEF (2018) also suggests that education policies and practices can reduce or reinforce educational disadvantage that stems from children's starting points and on-going family circumstances. Ireland and Latvia are at the top of the overall league table, which suggests that there are fewer inequalities in the Irish educations system than in other OECD jurisdictions. Despite all achievements and progress made, significant gaps in students' outcomes in education remain, mostly due to income inequality (Weir and Kavanagh, 2018).

Despite numerous improvements in the completion and progression rates, disparities by social class, ethnicity and nationality/migrant status remain evident in the Irish education system.

Retention rates in general have improved in recent years. However, students from lower socio-economic backgrounds and those living in designated disadvantaged areas continue to be over-represented in ESL figures (Doyle and Keane, 2018). Progression rates to higher education are high, with more than half of young people aged 15–34 obtaining a third-level qualification (OECD, 2017). But these figures do not reveal disparities and outcomes by social class, ethnicity, and nationality (Kennedy and Smith, 2018: 5). As shown by Hannon et al. (2017: 1227), participation rates of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds were only 14% in 2013 as a result of long-term educational disengagement, lack of information and guidance, limited performance at primary and secondary level of education, and the structure of admissions processes. This shows the well-established connection between social and educational inequalities in society.

Educational inequality pertains despite a constant narrowing of the gap between DEIS and non-DEIS schools in areas of reading and numeracy. According to Barnardos (2009: 12), the differences between DEIS and non-DEIS schools, both at primary and post-primary level, are that schools included under DEIS have a higher prevalence of pupils from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. DEIS schools also have a greater concentration of pupils from newcomer[9] and Traveller[10] communities, pupils with greater literacy and numeracy problems, pupils with emotional and behavioural problems, pupils with learning difficulties,

and families in contact with external agencies (Barnardos, 2009: 13).

The latest evaluation of DEIS schools (Weir and Kavanagh, 2018) shows that 33% of students from DEIS schools take the higher-level mathematics paper – significantly more than in 2007, when 19% availed of this option. This increase indicates that there has been a remarkable improvement in this area among DEIS schools. However, comparatively, these numbers still score much lower than among students attending non-DEIS schools, where 61% of students take the higher-level mathematics paper (Weir and Kavanagh, 2018: 11). As Byrne and McCoy (2017) argue, qualitative indicators, such as taking the higher-level mathematics paper, show persistent inequality among Irish students, which has not changed since the first measurements of early school leaving data in the 1970s. Their study also shows how social class background still shapes key transitions (e.g., from lower to upper secondary education and access to higher education) despite similar academic achievements.

Increased ethnic segregation is another aspect of educational inequality recognised in Irish schools today. Research (Ledwith and Reilly, 2013; Ledwith, 2017) shows that the constitutionally guaranteed right of school choice may have negative implications for children of families who recently moved to Ireland, as these families do not have country-specific knowledge (Darmody et al., 2014) or established social contacts in the communities where they live. Irish schools prioritise a student's application based on criteria such as parents' previous links with the school (i.e., previous siblings or other family members attending the school), area where a child lives, and time when the child registered an interest in attending the school (Ledwith, 2017: 340). They are differentiated along socio-economic lines and ability profiles of their students (Darmody et al., 2014: 135).

Migrant students are limited to the closest schools in the area and are over-represented in the larger, undersubscribed schools and schools in urban areas; it is also established that significantly more non-Irish-national than Irish national students are enrolled in DEIS schools (Byrne et al., 2010; Ledwith and Reilly, 2013; Darmody et al., 2014; Ledwith, 2017). As shown in the example of Roma students (Kennedy and Smith, 2018), non-Irish-national students are expected to 'fit into the system', while supports in doing so are somewhat limited. Also, as Faas et al. (2015) argue, migrant students are expected to feed into existing support structures available for disadvantaged students, which may not correspond

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[9] Newcomer communities are non-Irish families that have settled in Ireland from overseas countries.

[10] Traveller communities are an ethnic groups that, while recognising many social aspects of modern Irish society, have distinct cultural practices and values.

with their needs. Academic support for migrant students is limited to a certain amount of language support and restricted resources being provided for teachers' training (Darmody et al., 2014). As a result, targeted support at state and school level is required.

Access to higher education is another area where educational inequality needs to be tackled. As McCoy and Byrne (2011) report, higher-education rates have largely increased in the last decades, from 20% in the 1980s to 55% in the 2000s. Yet the participation rate of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds remains low, particularly among young people whose parents work in lower-level service, who usually follow a vocational route (Kennedy and Smith, 2018). These students report more negative experiences with school, suggesting there is a lack of career guidance and teacher's support available for students who do not progress to further education (McCoy and Byrne, 2011: 149).

This emphasises the importance of creating a positive climate in schools, establishing positive relationships with students and teachers, and providing career advice which would consider different pathways to education or work. The relevance of widening participation programmes and using the capability approach as 'a framework for understanding complexities of "meaningful" access to university' (Hannon et al., 2017: 1229) should be considered as useful in this regard. As the next section shows, alternative approaches and practices of education evolving around student-centred and student-led approaches should be considered in further developments of the Irish mainstream education system.

4.3 Exploring International Approaches to Alternative Education

The preceding section discussed the trajectory of the formal education system in Ireland from Independence up to now. Given the 'alternative' focus of the Awardee projects involved in the Education Fund, about whom this report and work are being conducted, this section outlines the main characteristics of alternative education and its role in supporting students through their educational pathways.

The relevance of these programmes for young people who do not fit in the mainstream school system is considered in this regard. Examples from different jurisdictions that are culturally and economically close to Ireland (USA, UK, and Australia) are used to show how the alternative sector of education caters for those learners. International comparisons between the education systems, for example PISA (OECD), have been used as a drive for educational change (Schleicher, 2013). As shown later in this section, Germany can serve as an example of how alternative approaches to education can be incorporated in the mainstream system of education.[11]

Alternative approaches of education are holistic in nature, and their value for learning has recently been recognised by mainstream systems across the world. Mainstream schooling systems across the OECD countries have widened their views on teaching by creating settings of learning that would enable the cognitive, metacognitive, and emotional development of learners (Sliwka and Yee, 2015: 175). Established mainstream systems in Germany and Canada (Alberta) have introduced student-centred approaches of learning, for example student-led conferences and coaching meetings (Sliwka and Yee, 2015). The education system reform in Alberta has experienced a paradigm shift in education through the idea of *Learning to Be*, with a wider focus on education itself instead of the school as an institution (Sliwka and Yee, 2015: 181). A partnership between teachers and learners is at the core of this change. Student-centred approaches and pedagogies are embedded in other internationally well-regarded education systems, including Singapore and Finland (Morgan, 2014; Lee et al., 2016).

Even though comparing and taking elements from other jurisdictions is not a straightforward task and should be done with caution (Hargreaves, 2013), it is established that learning and inquiring into the principles of good practices in education can improve education systems. Singapore's education system, internationally recognised as one of the most effective, has constantly learned from other education practices and approaches used around the world, with the aim of moving away from results- and competition-focused education towards a holistic approach. Similarly, Finland's goal in education was to provide equal educational opportunities to all young people (Sahlberg, 2013). Countries which experienced high rates of ESL in the past (e.g., Portugal) have recognised potential benefits of alternative approaches and pedagogies in the state-provided mass education. As Nada et al. (2018) show, mainstream schools could follow the example of alternative education settings by diversifying and innovating educational programmes according to students' needs and their complex trajectories.

[11] The Department of Education is preparing the first review of alternative education in Ireland, and its release is under way.
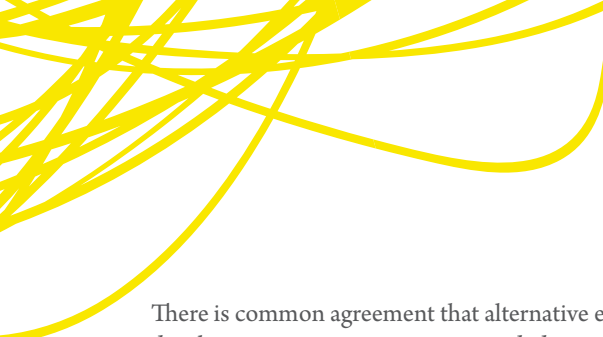
4.3.1 The Meaning of Alternative Education

The idea of alternative education emerged in the first half of the 19th century as a response to mainstream, state-provided education. Education reformers questioned state-provided education systems due to their focus on disciplining young people. According to them, public schooling aimed to achieve social and political uniformity, serving the needs of industrial society (Sliwka, 2008: 94). Historically, alternative approaches to education are linked with ideas of social reformers, religious believers, and romantics proposing different responses to public schooling. Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Émile* (1762) is often cited as an example that advocates for education which should pursue children's innate growth instead of society's demands.

In Western societies, alternative-education movements flourished in the first part of the 20th century, when different approaches and pedagogies emerged, including Montessori, Waldorf's, and reformist rural boarding schools (Sliwka, 2008). The peak of these movements was reached in the 1960s and 1970s, when various thinkers (e.g., Ivan Illich, A.S. Neill, Jonathan Kozol, and Paulo Freire) questioned the methods used in public, mainstream schools. Two philosophical roots of alternative education, *progressive* and *libertarian*, are recognised in the literature (Wiseman, 2017: 8)[12]. The progressive tradition is associated with the ideas of John Dewey and advocates for carefully planned educational experiences. Libertarians advocate for a non-interventionist approach to education by following principles of personal freedom and choice (Wiseman, 2017: 8) . Despite deriving from related educational traditions, the differences between the two traditions resulted in a rather contested meaning of alternative education.

There is no agreed singular definition of alternative education, due to a lack of clarity about its meaning and the variety of scope and programmes offered across the world (Aron and Zweig, 2003; McGregor and Mills, 2012). Mary Ann Raywid (1990: 31), a pioneer researcher in this area, elaborated on the on-going debates and confusion in alternative education in the following way:

> **Programs differ according to their missions (providing a more humane and effective education; segregating, containing and reforming and disruptive population, healing the wounded). They differ as to what to look to and begin working on when education fails (the student's misbehaviour, the student's psyche, or the school's environment). They differ according to the functions formally assigned them, and the expectations and demands of those to whom they report […]**

[12] This approach believes that parents and children should make their own educational and life choices.

There is common agreement that alternative education develops as a response to state-provided mainstream education, with its innovative curriculum and flexible programmes of study corresponding with students' interests and needs (Sliwka, 2008: 93). Pedagogical aspects of education are key in responding to students' disengagement from learning.

Experiences from different countries show that small-scale alternative education provisions are informal and have a less bureaucratic ambience. They also have small classes focusing on innovative and experiential learning, a flexible approach, a student-centred curriculum, one-to-one interaction between teachers and students, less hierarchical and more personal relationships, and a focus on people's personal, professional, and emotional development (Raywid, 1994; Aron, 2006; Thomson and Pennacchia, 2014; McCluskey and Mills, 2018; Pennacchia and Thomson, 2018; Tierney, 2018; Yoon and Kim, 2018). In the English context, characteristics such as duration of the programme, attendance time, location of provision, and curriculum offerings distinguish alternative from mainstream provisions of education (Thomson and Pennacchia, 2014). Additionally, these schools can be stand-alone, schools within schools, or satellite programmes of other schools (Tierney, 2018: 25). The term can refer to private and public schools, which refer to different forms of schooling. As discussed by McCluskey and Mills (2018), fee-paying schools are driven by choice following certain philosophical underpinnings (e.g., Steiner or Montessori). These so-called democratic schools tend to invite students who may have previous negative experience with mainstream schooling.

Benefits of alternative approaches to education have been widely recognised. Research shows that students' self-esteem, peer relationships, commitments to school, basic skills development, and general school performance improve in such settings (Aron, 2006; Lehr et al. 2009). As Te Riele et al. (2017) argue, five sets of benefits have been acknowledged in the literature: (1) There are improvements in attendees' numeracy and literacy skills and positive engagement with assessments and exams. (2) Students improve their engagement with studies, attendance rates, and disruptive behaviour through these programmes. (3) Students develop aspirations and future pathways to education and work in these settings. (4) Students reported increased self-esteem, well-being, and resilience levels. (5) Community engagement and pro-social behaviour have been strengthened through alternative programmes of education. However, most outcomes of alternative programmes are difficult to measure and are mostly based on anecdotal and observational data collected by providers of alternative programmes (Te Riele et al., 2017).

Despite numerous positive results, alternative education has received criticism. Issues linked to flexibility, quality of the programmes, and accountability have been particularly questioned in recent years. Reports from England have shown that the diversity provided by alternative settings can have positive results but also increase inequality when people receive diverse access to education (Pennacchia and Thomson, 2018). Staff training and inconsistent funding can have a detrimental impact on the quality of programmes, which is still 'understood through the lens of mainstreaming schooling' (Pennacchia and Thomson, 2018: 55). Issues such as lack of rigour, generalisation, and attention to long-term results require further attention in the alternative provision of education (Lehr et al., 2009: 21). As Tierney (2018: 30) argues, 'There has been increased opportunity for alternative schools to exist, but decreased opportunity for alternative schools to create programs that are radically alternative to mainstream education.' As result of the lack of clear understanding of the meaning of alternative education, various typologies and categorisations have developed. These are discussed next.

4.3.2 Mapping and Categorising Alternative Education

Various typologies and categorisations emerged as a response to the contested definition of alternative education. This section considers how different views on youth have shaped the discussion and typologies of alternative education.

Alternative education encompasses different types of schooling and organisations which differ in their views on youth. Mary Ann Raywid (1999) claims that there is a fundamental difference to how schools approach students and their vision(s) on education, which influences 'where the onus of change is placed' (Tierney, 2018: 19). Two different perspectives to schooling, *Youth at Risk and Learning Choice*, evolved in this regard. *Youth at Risk* is associated with last-chance and remedial-focus programmes attempting to change young people's behaviours (Raywid, 1990). As McGregor and Mills (2012) argue, this perspective tends to ignore the contextual aspects (e.g., the relationship between teacher and student, curriculum content, and teaching strategies) and to individualise the issues of early school leaving. Cieslik and Pollock (in Te Riele, 2007: 55) argue that the at-risk label 'inevitably involves political, ethical, and moral judgments by some in relation to others', and it may be more in the interest of governments than of youth. *Learning Choice* primarily addresses the need for schools to change and embrace the students' need for different learning environments and structural changes in mainstream schools (Tierney, 2018: 23). This approach recognises several factors in students' disengagement from learning, including low socio-economic status,

family situation, social and gender issues, cultural and ethnic barriers, mental health issues, and learning difficulties (McGregor et al., 2015).

Based on the two perspectives, *Youth at Risk* and *Learning Choice*, various types of alternative schools and programmes have been identified. The first systematic typology of alternative education in the US was developed by Raywid (1994), who identified three pure types of alternative schools: Type I: popular innovations or schools of choice, Type II: last-chance programmes, and Type III: remedial-focus schools, which are based on student affiliation.

Popular innovations are schools of choice which differ from traditional schools in their focus in innovation and administration. They are cost-effective mini-schools based within the mainstream placements which develop around creative and engaging pedagogies (Thomson, 2014: 9). In comparison, last-chance programmes provide the last resort for students facing expulsion or suspension, with a focus on behavioural change of a young person. Similar, remedial-focused schools focus on a young person's individual change, including economic and socio-emotional behaviours, or both. The aim of this programme is for a student to return to mainstream education after successful completion of the programme (Raywid, 1994). Based on the focus of the change of the programmes, Raywid revised her classification by merging previous types with the new ones. Her final typology of alternative programmes focuses on: changing the school (popular innovations); changing the student (last-chance and remedial schools); and changing the educational system (developed as a new category).

Raywid's classification has been subject to criticism which led to the development of new typologies of alternative education. Aron (2003), for example, rejected Raywid's typology, claiming that the alternative programmes and schools contain the elements of all three types of provisions, which overlap. Other mapping approaches analysed the programmes according to their focus (Thomson and Russell, 2007). A particularly interesting approach was taken by Te Riele (2007), who suggested that the purpose of the programmes or schools should be considered when mapping alternative provisions of education. She suggests differentiating the programmes according to their focus on youth at risk or learning choice. Accordingly, other issues can be identified, including purpose, target population, educational content, and planned outcomes or credentials (Thomson, 2014: 13).

Experiences from around the world show that cultural and contextual determinants should be considered when developing a typology of alternative education. Tierney (2018) argues that the categorisation of alternative schools in the US context is often defined by the school districts and communities in which they emerge. These involve the following characteristics: contexts in which schools developed, their attitudes towards young people, forms and structures, and their programme focus. For instance, based on socio-political and historical developments of South Korea, Cho-Han et al. (in Yoon and Kim, 2018) documented three types of alternative schools: schools with a traditional school structure which are often middle-class schools financed by parents; group home-schooling in which like-minded families teach children in informal settings; and alternative provisions for young people who are traditionally regarded as 'misfits'. National policy contexts and their impact on developments of this area should be considered in order to understand how the sector develops in different social and political contexts.

4.3.3 International Experiences of Alternative Educational Provision

This section examines how different countries have approached alternative provision of education according to their historical, social, and political developments. It refers to key education challenges and policy- and practice-focused responses from countries including the US, England, Australia, and Germany. The presented countries have been chosen for two reasons: the US, England, and Australia operate on similar cultural and economic models to Ireland; and Germany is chosen as a showcase of how alternative approaches of education informed and helped in reforming mainstream schooling.

Changing discourses of alternative education in the US: from progressive movements to neo-liberal approaches to schooling

Alternative education has been present in the US public school system for the last 40 years. Its origins derive from the civil rights movement (Lehr et al., 2009; Wiseman, 2017) and correspond with President's Johnson's War on Poverty, increased state funding of first- and second-level education, and the introduction of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, which focused on equal access to quality education (Wiseman, 2017; Tierney, 2018). As Tierney (2018: 16) argues, the policy context of alternative education needs to be viewed through the types of alternative schools that were established in the country in the four decades. Two broad categories of alternative education have been established in this regard: those developed within public education and those outside of it (Wiseman, 2017: 11).

It is important to note that alternative education in the US developed as a response to normative education not serving students in a fair and equitable manner. As Lehr et al. (2009: 19) argue, there is no clear agreement reached about the meaning of alternative education in the US. The sector involves a wide array of provisions of programmes, from independent study programmes, to charter schools and schools within schools. Additionally, it is argued that alternative education in its broadest sense involves all educational activities, which are not included in the traditional K-12 school system (Aron, 2006: 3). Today the programmes predominantly focus on vulnerable young people. There is a common definition of alternative education used in the US jurisdiction. Yet it remains unclear how this definition is operationalised and used in various US states:

> **A public elementary/secondary school that addresses the needs of students which typically cannot be met in a regular school and provides non-traditional education which is not categorized solely as regular education, special education, vocational education, gifted and talented or magnet school programs. (US Department of Education, in Lehr et al., 2009: 19)**

Policy and legislation that are focused on alternative education vary among the US states. Some states developed a detailed description of education schools and policies, while others provide only a vague legal framework for it. As Lehr et al. (2009: 22) comment, the states which developed alternative schooling policies as separated from the mainstream education follow comprehensive legislation, known under the name *Alternative Education, Schools, or Programs.* Research shows that 32 US states addressed funding issues related to alternative education in their policy documents in the early 2000s (Lehr et al., 2009). Yet the states have not prescribed how the funding process should be implemented, which affects the programmes' financial sustainability (Lehr et al., 2009: 26). Despite state funds being mentioned most often as source of funding, unreliable funding sources, such as grants and charitable contributions, constitute a major part of alternative education programmes' budget (Aron, 2006: 21).

Despite initial attempts to contribute to more progressive and holistic ways of schooling and learning, the alternative education policy has been hugely affected by the neo-liberal agenda since the 1980s. A discourse of innovative, progressive schools emerging in the 1960s and 1970s was gradually replaced with alternative schools being associated with students from disruptive, at-risk, and behaviourally challenging backgrounds (Lehr et al., 2009). Focus on competition and grades has been at the core of this policy development. A core policy document, 'A Nation at Risk', was released in 1983, promoting ideas of social efficiency and economic growth, overlooking the numbers of early school leavers (Tierney, 2018).[13] The focus of alternative provision of education shifted from progressive to more conservative and remedial orientation (Wiseman, 2017). There is a common agreement that these provisions mostly cater for students who are at risk of failing or dropping out of mainstream education.

The No Child Left Behind Act (2001) aimed to address issues connected with low-performing schools and students. Its four pillars – stronger accountability for results, more freedom for states and communities, proven education methods, and more choices for parents – impacted on low-performing students by focusing on early intervention and prevention and providing support for low-performing students (Aron, 2006: 20). However, as Lehr et al. (2009) argue, alternative programmes are considered as 'dumping grounds' for so-called disruptive or at-risk students. In a climate where schooling and education are based on competition and grades, only a limited space has been provided for personal development and a holistic view on learning. As a result, education choice is market-driven, while numerous alternative schools and programmes have been closed due to budget cuts (Tierney, 2018: 23).

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[13] One in three students in the US drop out of school yearly.

Focus on youth 'at risk' in alternative educational provision in England

Legal and policy aspects of alternative education in the UK need to be viewed in the wider system of education. Policy orientation in education has been committed to inclusive education for all young people in the mainstream schools, which has been enshrined in law since 1993 (Pennacchia and Thomson 2018: 48). A 30-year policy orientation of education policy has followed this agenda: (a) a shift from local-authority to central-government governance of schools system; (b) a shift from a system in which schools had a high degree of autonomy over the curriculum to a system in which schools enjoy a high degree of autonomy over funding; and (c) a change in regulation from exams and the pastoral support of advisers and inspectors to a system of tests and exams and data-driven inspection (ibid.).

Over the last 20 years, there were growing differences between the systems of the four countries (England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland) as result of historical developments but also asymmetry between the biggest country, England, and the other three, with their significantly smaller population size (Hodgson and Spours, 2016). Policy orientation in England has taken an extreme Anglo-Saxon approach, resulting in significant changes to the national curriculum and a more traditional direction in terms of content and pedagogy (Hodgson and Spours, 2016: 517).

Alternative education has been introduced to address the difficulties faced by young people from the margins of mainstream education. The purpose of alternative education in English jurisdiction is defined by law as follows:

> [...] for pupils who, because of exclusion, illness or other reasons, would not otherwise receive suitable education; education arranged by schools for pupils on a fixed period exclusion; and pupils being directed by schools to off-site provision to improve their behaviour. (Thomson and Pennacchia, 2016: 622-623)

The location and purpose of alternative provision of education are clearly specified in this definition, focusing on changing behaviour of young people who are not attending schools in an off-site location. English national policy considers alternative education as the last-chance resort for young people who were excluded or are at risk of exclusion from school (McCluskey and Mills, 2018). By following Raywid's typology, it can be concluded that the English example mainly follows the last-chance or remedial type of provision of alternative education which, as Thomson and Pennacchia (2016) rightly point out, excludes aspects of alternative education that are choice-driven and focused on alternative pedagogies.

Different types of programmes and providers of those programmes are available in the English jurisdiction. As in other countries, alternative education is not a clear-cut matter and revolves around an extensive offer of alternative programmes. As Thomson (2014) shows, the content and purpose of the alternative provision of education are also diverse, focusing on issues such as individual work-related placement, personal development provisions, placements focused on therapy and well-being, music and arts, or placements catering to students from referral units.

Various reports, such as the New Labour Report in 2008, recognised several problems with the provision of alternative education in England. As Pennacchia and Thomson (2018) report, the quality of alternative education is particularly questionable due to insufficient quality of programmes and inconsistent funding. Consistency of the approaches used, cost of provision, inadequate monitoring, and lack of effective reintegration are also listed as emerging challenges (Thomson, 2014: 3). Analysis of policy documents shows that users of alternative education are mostly presented as at-risk, vulnerable, and disenfranchised, which Michael Gove described as an 'educational underclass' (Taylor, in Wiseman, 2017: 14).

The literature shows that Scotland has developed a different approach to alternative education. The Scottish model of education developed separately from the UK after the end of the Second World War and is 'almost wholly independent of English education policy' (Hodgson and Spours, 2016: 518). Its approach to education follows ideas of inclusion and equity. The system does not envisage separate pupil referral units or a market of the providers of alternative education (Pennacchia and Thomson, 2018: 61). As Hodgson and Spours (2016) argue, educational governance in Scotland differs significantly from England by having its own national regulatory and qualifications development body (the Scottish Qualifications Authority, SQA) and

recognising a strong role for local authorities and teacher unions in the creation of education policy. This system does not foresee a separated alternative provision of education, but rather focuses on 'inclusion units within the education which is overseen by local authorities' (Pennacchia and Thomson, 2018: 61). All young people across the continuum of education follow the same curriculum, The Curriculum of Excellence 2010, which develops around areas of literacy, numeracy, health, and well-being. As Hodgson and Spours (2016) point out, this curricular reform has been foreseen by Scottish policymakers as a response to the need for greater choice and creativity and as a response to critics who saw the system as unequal and too academic. The curriculum is therefore marked by a focus on promoting a broader set of skills and four key outcomes: 'successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors' (Hodgson and Spours, 2016: 518).

Policy and practice dimensions of 'flexi schools' in Australia

Alternative education in Australia refers to 'flexi schools' or second-chance schools which, primarily cater for young people from economically disadvantaged backgrounds (Wiseman, 2017). These programmes developed as a response to mainstream approaches to education. They argue that traditional schools do not work well for all young people and therefore advocate for a more inclusive approach to education. Alternative education in Australia has its origins in the progressive movement and the equity programmes (1960s–1980s). However, in the last decade, the programmes have focused on disadvantaged young people (Te Riele et al., 2017: 118). Most alternative schools are independent and fees-free, and sit outside of state jurisdiction. However, they are subsidised by the states and need to follow a variety of governmental controls and regulations (Mills and McGregor, 2018: 67). The policy framework focused on alternative education is a work in progress in Australia. The sector is unregulated, with varying quality of the alternative programmes (Mills and McGregor, 2018: 66). Lack of clarity about the quality of the programmes has led to inefficiency and confusion, resulting in difficulty for young people and their parents in choosing appropriate programmes (Te Riele, 2007).

Australia has one of the lowest school completion rates among the OECD states.[14] In the last decade, alternative education has instigated the interest of governments, philanthropists, and civil society by following the 'learning or earning' agenda (Mills and McGregor, 2018). Federal, state, and territory governments have changed the requirements around schooling and introduced

policies focused on flexible educational pathways (Te Riele, 2014: 22). The policy has been established as a response to low school retention levels following an idea to keep young people in education or employment until they are 17. As Te Riele (2014, 2017) reports, the core policies in alternative education stem from the National Partnership Agreement on Youth Attainment and Transitions, which came into force in 2009. In this policy context, all federal, state, and territory governments agreed to increase the youth attainment rate from 83.5% in 2009 to 90% in 2015 (Te Riele, 2014: 22). This target aimed at 90% of young people achieving upper-secondary education; in practice, it is mainly understood as raising the school age to 17.

Alternative education has become an attractive option for pupils who are not engaged with mainstream schooling (McCluskey and Mills, 2018: 5). However, the increase in interest in alternative schooling can also be a response to the newly established policy context which 'encourages' young people to stay in education until they are 17 by restricting their access to social welfare benefits (Te Riele, 2014). Additionally, McGregor et al. (2015) argue that governmental interest in funding alternative provision of education has a clear focus on improving school retentions but does not ensure that all students will also receive a 'meaningful education'.

Several key strategies, such as Youth Connections, and School Business Community Brokers, have been introduced to implement the policies of National Partnership agreement (Te Riele, 2014). Various providers of alternative education or training were joined under the umbrella of the Youth Connections programme, which aimed to support young people who were disengaged or at-risk of disengagement from education. As Te Riele (2014) reports, this approach resulted in a positive development of existing and new programmes focused on alternative provision of education bringing constant positive outcomes for young people. School Business Community Brokers was a strategic approach enabling flexible learning and training programmes at community level (Te Riele, 2014). Due to budget cuts, the funding for both strategies ceased in 2014 despite their proven positive impact on young people's participation, engagement, attainment, and transition outcomes (Dandolo Partners, in Te Riele, 2014: 24). The School Assistance Act (2004) is another key policy document for alternative provision of education. It provides targeted and allocated funding to Special Assistance Schools (SASs), which primarily host students with social, emotional, and behavioural difficulties (Te Riele, 2014: 25). Alternative programmes which become recognised by the state or territorial

[14] In 2017, the year 7–12 retention rate for Australia was 84.4%.

authorities as Special Assistance Schools can receive substantial funding.

Currently, neo-liberal policies are implemented in Australia. The focus of this system is on exam results, individual competition, narrowing the curricular choices to core subjects such as literacy, numeracy, and science, and reducing pedagogical aspects of education. Competition between schools is based on international league tables, which provide parents of future students with detailed information on competitiveness of a specific school (Mills and McGregor, 2018: 67). As argued by Wiseman (2017: 15), neo-liberal policies have widened social inequality by blaming young people for not 'fitting in the system'. Research shows that current policy orientation in alternative education follows an approach of changing a young person rather than changing schools (Mills and McGregor, 2018). In her research, Te Riele (2007) shows that by following a 'youth at risk' approach,[15] the policy sees alternative provision as the way to 'fix' young people. Alternative schools can be considered as a second chance or final option for education for young people who may not be wanted by mainstream schools. As shown in Queensland, where principals in mainstream schools got greater disciplinary power, some state and territory policies tend to focus on discipline and behaviour management instead of learning (Te Riele, 2014). This brings to the fore an important consideration of the mainstream schools not addressing the needs of the most disadvantaged students (Mills and McGregor, 2018).

What did the German education system learn from Reformist pedagogy?

Reformist pedagogy, which is an equivalent to alternative education, has a long tradition in Germany. Friedrich Fröbel, the father of the first modern kindergarten, initially coined this phrase in connection with alternative and innovative pedagogical ideas. Since then, the reformist pedagogy presented a shift in view on learning, from teacher-centred to student-engaged learning (Sliwka and Klopsch, 2018). Student agency and a focus on learning instead of teaching have been recognised as key elements of alternative education in this context. Democratic and progressive aspects of education were introduced already in the Weimar constitution, which put talent and interest ahead of pupils' social background. However, as Sliwka and Klopsch (2018) acknowledged, this legal aspect lasted for a short while and was replaced with authoritarianism under the Nazi regime. The idea re-emerged in 1968 with the rise of the student movement, which opposed traditionalism and autocracy and established the climate in which numerous

alternative provisions of education were established in West Germany. Montessori and Steiner schools were particularly popular at the time. Today the legislation provides a chance to establish alternative schools in all 16 states, which are called *Freie Schulen* or Free Schools (Sliwka and Klopsch, 2018: 219). As in other countries, Germany's alternative education builds on concepts of student choice and agency, active engagement in learning, and diversity as a resource for learning. For example, project-based learning and weekly work are used to encourage individual learning and development of organisational skills. Most importantly, the notion of diversity in education has developed in opposition to the concept of homogeneity which has been used in the mainstream schools.

Germany's system of education is highly stratified at secondary level. At the early age of 9 to 11, children go through competence assessment which is used as a criterion to classify them for different secondary schools. However, this stratification and diversification differs across the 16 states due to their autonomy in policymaking. Despite a general perception that Germany has a tripartite school system, most states maintain large numbers of schools which cater for children with physical and learning disabilities and behavioural challenges (Sliwka, 2010: 209).

Lack of awareness about diversity in learning has been rooted in the German education system. According to Sliwka (2010: 209), one of the fundamental principles was led by the belief that 'the homogeneity of learners in a group best facilitates their individual learning'. Selecting students for the 'right' type of school corresponds with this general assumption of providing the best education for the average student in a class. However, this approach does not recognise similarities and differences within and between classrooms. Students are treated the same despite their differences in interests and abilities (Sliwka, 2010). Lack of awareness about the diversity is problematic specifically when considering schooling of different groups of students, including migrant children and pupils from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Policy developments in this area have recognised the problem particularly after average performance in the PISA survey in 2000 (Sliwka and Yee, 2015; Sliwka and Kopsch, 2018), which revealed the lack of support provided in German schools for pupils from migrant and low socio-economic backgrounds. Since then, policy has acknowledged a slow recognition of issues of diversity in education.

A general understanding of every child having the potential to learn and develop has been acknowledged by educators and schools, applying a reformist pedagogy

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[15] Young people at risk are those who come from dysfunctional families or have experience with young pregnancy, drugs, alcohol, criminal activity, antisocial behaviour, or abuse.

and didactic approaches in mainstream schools. Sliwka (2010) recognises some positive developments since the mid-2000s, including the introduction of the German School Award, which encourages schools to look for innovative ways of dealing with diversity in students' interests, abilities, and educational backgrounds. This top-down award has initiated a wider public discussion on what a good school is and instigated change in mainstream schools (Sliwka and Yee, 2015). Initiatives such as this resulted in a changing policy context in some states, which introduced the idea of a new type of school based on principles addressing achievement, equity, well-being, and a focus on personal and cooperative learning (Sliwka and Yee, 2015). Interestingly, some concepts of alternative education, such as student-centred learning and personalisation of learning, are now officially recognised in German schools. Policy documents encourage other alternative practices, such as close professional collaboration and a working-together approach between teachers and students (Sliwka and Klopsch, 2018). As a result, traditional pedagogies have been merged with reformist ones, contributing to a different idea of a good school.

4.4 Conclusion

This section first considered key policy developments in education in Ireland from the post-independence era until the review of the DEIS programme in 2017. It then introduced alternative approaches to education, the contested nature of the term, and the potential benefits of these approaches for learners and education systems. It discussed international policy implications on the development of alternative approaches of education, based on examples from four countries (US, England, Australia, and Germany). A detailed summary of the Irish and international examples is contained in Appendix 4. The next section introduces the idea of social innovation and its role in addressing and changing complex societal issues, such as education.

05

SOCIAL INNOVATION AND SOCIETAL CHANGE

5.1 Social Innovation Fund Ireland

Social Innovation Fund Ireland (SIFI) was established by the government in 2015 to stimulate philanthropy and fill a gap in funding innovation for the non-profit sector. Its mission is to provide growth capital and supports to the best social innovations in Ireland, enabling them to scale and maximise their impact. SIFI therefore finds and backs innovative solutions, which address critical social issues in Ireland. Every euro it raises is matched by a euro from the Department of Rural and Community Development via the Dormant Accounts Fund. Since 2015, SIFI has partnered with companies such as Google, Medtronic, Mason Hayes & Curran, and IPB Insurance, as well as SMEs, philanthropic trusts, families, and individuals. With the support from its partners, it has created 22 funds to date, which address social issues relating to Tech For Good, Community Resilience, Social Enterprise Development, Education, Health, Mental Health, and more. These funds have provided grants and business supports to 86 social innovations in Ireland.

In 2013, the government set a target for Social Innovation Fund Ireland to raise over €5 million in philanthropic funding, which SIFI has now exceeded (€6 million). The Programme for Government has committed to increasing the scale of SIFI matched funding to €50 million, creating a potential €100 million fund for social innovation. SIFI is on track to be a €60 million Innovation Fund by end of 2021, in line with Programme for Government Commitments for match funding. The relationship between SIFI and the Education Fund will be discussed later.

5.2 The Role of Social Innovation in Societal Change

Social Innovation Fund Ireland was established to find and support innovative solutions to pressing social problems. This section defines the concept of social innovation and identifies its key characteristics and its connection with philanthropy. It concludes by taking a closer look at the potential for social innovation in the area of education reform.

5.2.1 Defining Social Innovation

'Social innovation' is attracting increased attention among policymakers in Europe and globally. It is heralded largely for its potential capacity to overcome societal challenges and social demands. A 2018 Atlas of Social Innovation attests to a wealth of initiatives and activities that are dedicated to addressing the social, economic, political, and environmental challenges of the 21st century. The global mapping was undertaken in part to explore 'how

Social Innovation may contribute to advance inclusive and wealth-creating public policies' (Howaldt et al., 2018: 3). In its Europe 2020 Strategy, the European Union identified social innovation as a tool in achieving targets in a number of areas, including growing unemployment, climate change, and increased migration (European Commission, 2013). While the concept itself is widely acknowledged as an umbrella term subject to nuances of language, discipline, and culture, the following definitions highlight its key features:

> **Specifically, we define social innovations as new ideas (products, services and models) that simultaneously meet social needs (more effectively than alternatives) and create new social relationships or collaborations. (Reeder et al., 2012: 10)**

From this perspective, such innovations are 'regarded as new products, processes and methods that in a creative and sustainable manner, offer a better solution to one or several social demands' (Unceta et al., 2016: 195). As a concept, social innovation is distinctive both in its understanding of innovation (beyond the market) and in its relationships, in the new forms of cooperation and collaboration that it brings. As Moulaert et al. (2013: 2) set out, social innovation has its genesis in the inadequacy of traditional systems to address societal problems:

> **Socially innovative actions, strategies, practices and processes arise whenever problems of poverty, exclusion, segregation and deprivation or opportunities for improving living conditions cannot find satisfactory solutions in the 'institutionalized field' of public or private action.**

This alternative or 'third way' recognises past failures of conventional service delivery to tackle poverty and social inclusion and seeks to 'promote new ways of doing things grounded in the social relations and experiences of those in need' (Moulaert et al., 2013). Grimm et al. (2013: 436) highlight the opportunity for greater integration and a holistic approach to solving problems:

> **Social innovation discourses see in social challenges opportunities to make societies more sustainable and cohesive through inclusive practices, coproduction and proactive grassroots initiatives.**

Central to the concept is the idea of new forms of social relations. As Ayob et al. (2016) identify, these comprise, firstly, new forms of collaboration at individual or organisational level, often implying less-hierarchical relationships between government, civil society, and citizens, leading to novel ideas or innovations. Secondly, these innovations can lead to a restructuring of social and power relations in the way they are implemented. In this way, 'agency' by involving target groups and empowering beneficiaries, increasing their capacities to meet social needs, is a critical component of social innovation (Howaldt and Hochgerner, 2018).

There is consensus that social innovation, broadly interpreted, involves both new ideas and collaborations to address social needs in a more effective manner. Moulaert et al. (2013) found three generic and interrelated features of social innovation to be satisfaction of needs, reconfigured social relations, and empowerment. Such characteristics translate into a framework or set of practices where a systematic change element is key. At the level of operationalisation, it can be observed across a range of aspects, including greater diversity and differentiation in services as well as rationalisation and value in service provision.

> **Social innovation approaches as characterised by the European Commission (2013: 9) are:**
> - Open rather than closed when it comes to sharing and owning knowledge
> - Multi-disciplinary and more integrated to problem-solving than the single-department or single-profession solutions of the past
> - Participative and empowering of citizens and users rather than top-down and expert-led
> - Demand-led rather than supply-driven
> - Tailored rather than mass-produced, as most solutions have to be adapted to local circumstances and personalised to individuals.

5.2.2 Characteristics of Social Innovation

Social innovation has been described as a 'quasi-concept' (Unceta et al., 2016) and as a contested or underdeveloped concept (Antadze and Westley, 2012; Ayob et al., 2016). It is attractive in that it poses an alternative to welfare systems unable to meet the diverse changes in an emerging society. A critical attribute is the capacity for multiple meanings. For this reason, it has been argued, the concept has proved attractive to policymakers, because its amorphous meaning and positive connotations mean that it cannot be disproven (Grimm et al., 2013; Ziegler, 2017). At the same time, proposed solutions are assumed to have a positive impact

(Ayob et al., 2016). Questions have arisen as to its usefulness for policy, given the broad range of activities that fall under the concept. Nonetheless, it has a number of salient features by which it can be distinguished.

Cross-sectoral collaboration is an essential part of social innovation efforts; to flourish it needs to be part of a social network of public, private, and civic society actors. It is the particular constellation of partners, united in a goal-oriented framework, that differentiates social innovation from related concepts such as social change or social enterprise. According to Howaldt and Hochgerner (2018: 19):

> **What distinguishes social innovations from other manifestations of social change is that they are driven by certain actors in an intentional targeted manner with the goal of better satisfying or answering needs and problems than is possible on the basis of established practices.**

Moreover, coalition or networks are the inherent drivers of change. This contrasts with the business model, where innovation originates in the individual enterprise:

> **Whereas in business the firm is the key agent of innovation, in the social field the drive is more likely to come from a wider network, perhaps linking some commissioners in the public sector, providers in social enterprises, advocates in social movements, and entrepreneurs in business. (Murray et al., 2010: 7)**
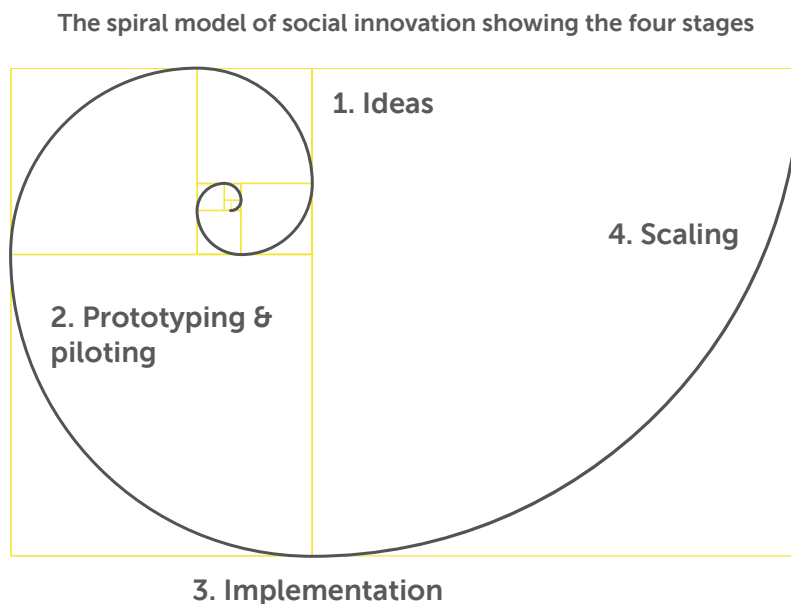
Murray et al. (2010) contend that unlike in the business field, innovation in the social sphere comes from networks and cross-sectoral collaboration. Systemic innovation 'involves changes to concepts or mind-sets' – a recognition that systems only change when people think and see in new ways. The elements required to make this happen require coalitions that bring together different partners, intensive processes to achieve shared visions, a critical mass of practical examples, training professionals and practitioners with new skills, and accessing professional expertise in evaluation. Likewise, Ziegler (2017: 401) argues that the most useful construct is to view social innovation as a 'collaborative concept' that creates space for multidisciplinary and multi-actor discussion that 'extends beyond economics and management studies, and that highlights human creativity from the proposition of ideas to their diffusion beyond a focus on products and services for markets'. Nonetheless,

she cautions that there is a 'gap between an apparent "consensus" on participation in social innovation projects and policies, and de facto possibilities of participation, especially of disadvantaged groups'. Some commentators attribute deficiencies to a lack of infrastructure. An EU report (Ziegler, 2017) concluded that framework conditions for social innovation to flourish are lacking. These include support structures similar to those that have been developed for technology funding in the last decades as well as policy institutions with direct responsibility for social innovation.

A key characteristic of social innovation is that the concept provides for a process by which responses to social needs are developed, implemented, evaluated for effectiveness, and scaled up. It is this process or proactive aspect that differentiates the concept from social change, for example (Grimm et al., 2013). Howaldt and Hochgerner (2018) outline a process of invention, diffusion, and institutionalisation of new social practices in different areas of social action. In essence, social innovation encompasses a series of stages for generating, developing, scaling up, and disseminating ideas. However, unlike business models, it has an inherently political dimension (Ayob et al., 2016). Figure 5.1 (2013: 9) illustrates the process.

Figure 5.1: Stages of social innovation

The spiral model of social innovation showing the four stages

1. Ideas

4. Scaling

2. Prototyping & piloting

3. Implementation

Source: Young Foundation: Social Innovation Exchange, reproduced in EU (2013)

5.2.3 Social Innovation and Philanthropy

For commentators on philanthropy, social innovation occupies a core part of the debate on new or entrepreneurial forms of investment that have resonance for policy in modern democracies. Anheier (2005: 324) notes the 'insight that philanthropy provides for investment in the production of public goods, preferably aiming at innovations or increased effectiveness'. Innovation, according to Anheier (2005), is the 'signature characteristic' of philanthropic foundations. The consensus around innovation is largely tied in with debates about foundations' unique ability to take risks or to take advantage of the freedom they have to experiment or to act quickly. This latitude, Frumkin (2006: 16) argues, means 'philanthropy can play a vital role as a 'social inquisitor', asking questions about what is possible, what works best, and what design change in programmes might lead to improved performance'.

For Frumkin, social innovation involves interventions designed to promote new thinking, new ways of conceptualising and responding to enduring social problems, and ultimately new ways of providing services; all are functions that foundations are well placed to undertake (2006: 15). It offers the most useful construct with which to assess the capacity for change proffered by philanthropic intervention. The idea that foundation funds 'can promote ideological diversity and service differentiation' is also seen as a contribution to pluralism that legitimises their role in society (Prewitt, 2006: 368). This function, manifested in social experimentation, is often contrasted with the constraints put upon the State as a service provider in its obligation to provide a uniformity of services to all qualifying citizens, as well as the pressures on the market to be as viable to as many customers as possible. In practice, this form of philanthropy adopts a public policy orientation and seeks engagement with the State. In Ireland, it emerged with the work of Atlantic Philanthropies and ONE Foundation, and the Forum on Philanthropy and Fundraising (2012), which highlighted the potential for new public–private partnerships, through the creation of a National Social Innovation Fund to support social innovations with the potential for impact on critical social issues.

5.2.4 Scaling Up and Evaluating Social Impact

Identifying promising programmes and helping them to expand are primary considerations for social innovation. Having demonstrated a programme's tangible results or impact, the focus is then on bringing them to a broader scale (Bishop and Green, 2008). 'Scaling up' generally entails significant organisational growth, central coordination, and replication. In practice, the diffusion and adoption of model social programmes are the primary strategies (Dees et al., 2004). Models for achieving scale are often drawn from the corporate strategy for venture companies. These include franchising, 'in which a programmatic idea is packaged and made available to other social entrepreneurs either through autonomous units or through affiliated entities' (Frumkin, 2003: 5). It involves testing, developing, and debugging the service model before replication to other sites.

Others have called for wider understanding of the issue of scale to consider different ways of both defining and spreading their innovations before determining whether and how to proceed. Dees et al. (2004), for instance, argue that scaling of innovations can take place through more diverse mechanisms focused on identifying core elements: social innovations spread as an *organisational model:* an overarching structure for mobilising people and resources to serve a common purpose; or in the form of a *programme:* an integrated set of actions that serve a specific purpose. Additionally, they suggest, some innovations are framed in terms of *principles:* general guidelines and values about how to serve a given purpose. This more diverse way of defining social innovations enables clarity on what are the core elements that can be defined in a way that is both effective and transferable and avoids the confusion associated with scaling up and replication.

In the end, despite the number of successful innovations, replication is rare, and expanding programmes with proven impact is complex (Bradach, 2003; Frumkin, 2003). As Bradach (2003: 23) reminds us, a paradox of the non-profit sector, and one of the 'most vexing problems facing non-profit leaders', is the fact that funding rarely follows success. While the failure to replicate innovative social programmes is usually attributed to problems of strategy and management, he concludes that 'much of the time, it is simply a problem of money'.

Measurement of social impact is complex. As a concept, social innovation is difficult to assess. The core problem is one where, in social innovation, 'achievements are often centred on new types of relationships and changed minds rather than tangible products' (Reeder et al., 2012: 7). Alongside this, in understanding social innovation as solutions to social problems, issues to be overcome include: the complexity of relationships and partnership working making for difficulty in attributing effects; the cross-cutting nature of activity involved; and the diversity of impact measures and tools in operation.

As a process, social innovation emerges in an environment of nonlinear, uncertain, and unpredictable variables, with progress depending on shifting, adaptive elements of cycle. Unlike the linear, cause-and-effect relationships characteristic of innovation in business, social innovation operates with its own dynamics and multidimensional impacts (Grimm et al., 2013). An analysis of current models of social impact measurement and evaluation undertaken by Antadze and Westley (2012) indicated that, largely grounded in the logic of mainstream financial and business and cost-benefit analyses, they were inadequate to assess the nature of change involved. They cautioned: 'Staying within the established social impact measurement paradigm may pose a risk to society's ability to generate effective social innovation' (2012: 148). Rather, they suggest that a developmental evaluation approach may address the deficiencies associated with such metrics. In particular, they refer to the importance of 'context sensitivity' in developmental evaluation:

> **Specifically, with regard to metrics, developmental evaluation emphasizes the importance of context sensitivity and specificity. Given the diversity of innovation contexts, no standardized or generic metrics are either possible or desirable for developmental evaluation. Rather, the development of metrics must be built in to the social innovation process as a central aspect of developmental evaluation, and those metrics may change as emergent processes and outcomes give rise to emergent metrics. (2012: 147)**

5.2.5 Education and Social Innovation

A study by Kapoor et al. (2018) examined observable trends in social innovation for education taking place across 30 initiatives in 11 countries. The study found that while social innovation in education is well founded in the developing countries, Europe is still gaining progressive momentum in this direction. Defining social innovations as 'novel solutions addressing social challenges in education contributing towards newer and better practices' (2018: 190), the study found that such practices included concepts, policy instruments, and new forms of cooperation and organisation developed or adapted by users, including citizens, customers, and politicians.

> **While it generated many new practices, the study found that critically, 'social innovation also requires appropriate social innovation policies' and that many potential social innovations are hindered by traditional approaches in public policies (Kapoor et al., 2018: 200)**

Projects adopting social innovation approaches faced barriers across a number of areas, especially funding challenges (19.7%), followed by lack of personnel, absence of participants, restrictions through legal frameworks, lack of institutional access, and political opposition. The study identified the primary drivers influencing social innovation as networks, individuals, and groups; innovative environment, ICT, and governance and politics operated to a minor degree. Key areas that required attention in addressing issues such as school drop-out rates – for which EU policy seeks a 10% reduction – included the social inclusion of migrant populations. The innovative character of solutions focused on the combination of educational issues with urban development issues. The importance of early childhood education was also addressed by a significant number of cases in this study.

5.3 Conclusion

This section introduced the emergence and role of SIFI in Ireland and then reviewed the notion of social innovation more broadly.

06

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Over the three years of this study, the evaluation will investigate the extent to which practices and process utilised by Awardees can serve as models of excellence in overcoming inequality in education. Using a robust research and evaluation methodology, the evaluators will address this by specifically identifying the 'gold standard' from among the 10 projects. This will mean identifying which projects best support their students to progress from QQI levels 3–6 and which projects have a proven potential worth scaling.

This report has detailed the work conducted by the evaluators during year 1 of the Education Fund (December 2017 to December 2018). The information presented in this report is largely contextual, setting the scene for the evaluation of the Education Fund to come. The report, which consisted of four key areas: First, it explained how an evaluation framework, needed to establish the 'Gold Standard' from among the 10 Education Fund projects, was created. Then, some early data and findings emanating from the implementation of the evaluation framework were presented. Thirdly, it critiqued the formal education system in Ireland from Independence to now and contextualised the nature of alternative educational provision from other jurisdictions. Finally, it introduced Social Innovation Fund Ireland and explored, more broadly, the concept of social innovation, its defining characteristics and its link to educational reform.

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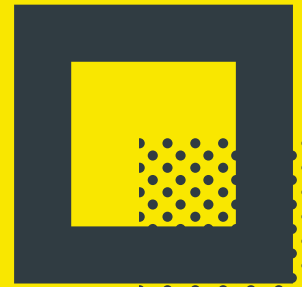
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Appendix 1:

PROJECT CLUSTERING PROCESS

1. Development of Categories Based on Projects' Vision

The data gathered under the vision section was coded and compared. The codes were read several times and organised in categories: *(a) systemic educational inequality, (b)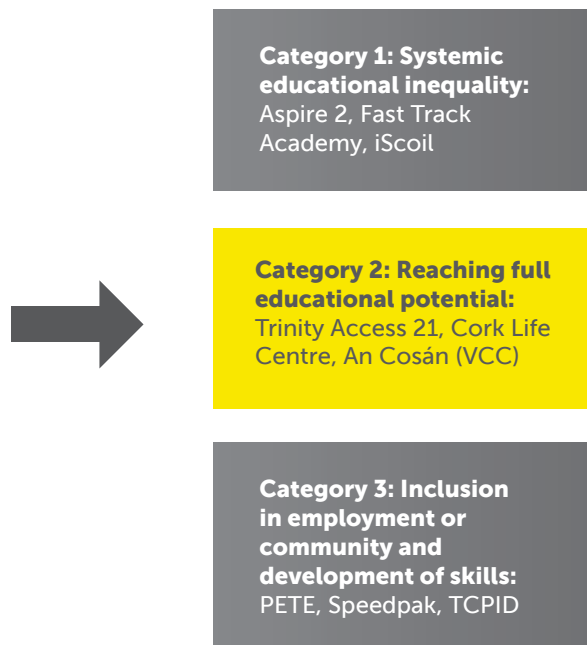 reaching full educational potential, (c) inclusion in* employment or community and development of skills. Each programme was matched with the recognised categories, resulting in the first matching of projects.

Table 1 shows the emerging codes, while **Figure 1** shows how the categories of projects were developed and matched with the projects.

Table 1: Codes emerging from vision section

PROJECT MODELS	CODES
Trinity Access 21	Opportunity to reach full educational potential
An Cosán VCC	Achieving full educational potential; access to education to all
Preparation for Education, Training and Employment (PETE)	Inclusion, work/employment and mainstream education, exit homelessness
Trinity Centre for People with Intellectual Disabilities (TCPID)	Enhancing capabilities of people with ID (inclusive education)
Aspire 2	System inequalities, apprenticeship, tackling educational disadvantage
Fast Track Academy	Youth education, third level and social disadvantage
Cork Life Centre	Holistic alternative approach to mainstream education, full potential
Speedpak Enhanced Skills Traineeship (Speedpak)	Skills and knowledge for unemployed youth
iScoil	Tackling educational disadvantage and inclusive education

Figure 1: Three recognised categories matched with the SIFI projects' vision

Category 1: Systemic educational inequality: Aspire 2, Fast Track Academy, iScoil

Category 2: Reaching full educational potential: Trinity Access 21, Cork Life Centre, An Cosán (VCC)

Category 3: Inclusion in employment or community and development of skills: PETE, Speedpak, TCPID

2. Development of Codes and Categories from Projects' Aims and Objectives

A description of projects' aims and objectives was used to further compare the programmes. Despite clearly shared aims, the projects tailored their programmes to address the needs of the geographic and social spaces in which they operate. Thi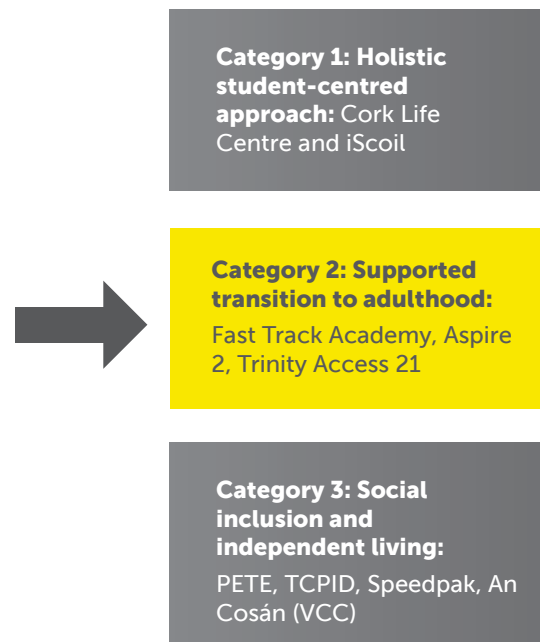s became evident when the coded material was joined into categories. Three main categories were recognised, focusing on: *(a) a holistic, student-centred approach, (b) supported transition to adulthood, and (c) social inclusion and independent living.*

Table 2 presents the codes developed in this part of the document. **Figure 2** shows how the SIFI projects were matched in pairs based on developed categories and sub-categories.

Table 2: Codes emerging from the Aims section

PROJECT MODELS	CODES
Trinity Access 21	Active learning approach, Pathways to college, Mentoring, Leadership through service, Student-led
An Cosán VCC	Social change and inclusion, Scaffolding, Blended learning
Preparation for Education, Training and Employment (PETE)	Prevent homelessness, Support independent living
Trinity Centre for People with Intellectual Disabilities (TCPID)	Social inclusion, Life-long learning, Professional training, Participation in higher education
Aspire 2	Further education, Apprenticeship, Mentoring, Transitions to adulthood
Fast Track Academy	Transition to adulthood and higher education, Social and academic skills, Leaving Cert
Cork Life Centre	Holistic, social, personal and academic development, Students' voice, Voluntary participation, Ethos of trust, Servol model
Speedpak Enhanced Skills Traineeship (Speedpak)	Formal training and development of skills, Traineeship, Corporate values, Integrity, honesty and respect, Community, Innovation, Collaboration
iScoil	Blended learning, Safe, encouraging space, Holistic, online learning, Student-centred approach, Innovative use of technology, Flexible, interest-led approach

Figure 2: Three recognised categories matched with the SIFI projects aims and objectives

Category 1: Holistic student-centred approach: Cork Life Centre and iScoil

Category 2: Supported transition to adulthood: Fast Track Academy, Aspire 2, Trinity Access 21

Category 3: Social inclusion and independent living: PETE, TCPID, Speedpak, An Cosán (VCC)

3. Development of Codes and Categories based on Projects' Activities

The next categories were developed by comparing the data gathered from descriptions of projects' activities. As in previous parts, several similarities were recognised between the projects. Two main categories of activities were recognised through the coding process: *(a) mentoring and pathways to third level, and (b) training, support, and social inclusion.*

Table 3 outlines the emerging codes, while **Figure 3** shows how the SIFI projects were matched based on developed categories.

Table 3: Codes emerging from the project activities data

PROJECT MODELS	CODES
Trinity Access 21	Pathways to college, Mentoring, Leadership through service, Continuing professional development (student-led, empowerment)
An Cosán VCC	Blended, online learning, Mentoring; Face-to-face workshops, Peer learning, Technology workshops, third-level
Preparation for Education, Training and Employment (PETE)	Build the confidence and skills to overcome barriers, Individualised plan, Appropriate training and supports, Accredited training, Flexibility, Focus on individual needs
Trinity Centre for People with Intellectual Disabilities (TCPID)	Social inclusion, Life-long learning, Professional training, Participation in higher education
	Occupational therapy and individual work, Research methods, Applied science, Technology and maths, Business and marketing, Advocacy, rights and culture, Learning skills to advocate for their rights, Fine arts and languages, Work placement, Career guidance
Aspire 2	Participating schools to improve educational progression outcomes, Student mentoring sessions, Student work experience, Parent forums
Fast Track Academy	Teaching, Mentoring, Work placement, Career talks, Volunteer role model, Courses such as STEM, numeracy, literacy, personal development courses
Cork Life Centre	Teaching and tutoring
Speedpak Enhanced Skills Traineeship (Speedpak)	QQI 4 and 5, Work experience and skills
IScoil	QQI 3, Interest-led, project-based learning, Blended, online learning

Figure 3: Two recognised categories matched with the SIFI projects' activities

Category 1: Mentoring and pathways to third level: Trinity Access 21, Aspire 2, Fast Track Academy, Cork Life Centre

Category 2: Training, support and social inclusion: PETE, Speedpak, iScoil, An Cosán (VCC), TCPID

4. Development of Codes and Categories based on Participants' age

Two categories have been recognised by considering the age of participants involved in the programmes, divided into: young people (12–18 years old) and adults (18+).

Table 4: Categories developed by considering age criteria

CATEGORIES BASED ON PARTICIPANTS' AGE	PROJECTS
Category 1: Young people secondary school (12–18)	Trinity Access 21, Fast Track Academy, Aspire 2, iScoil, Cork Life Centre
Category 2: Adults (over 18)	PETE, Speedpak, An Cosán (VCC), TCPID

5. Development of Categories Based on Positionality Towards the Mainstream Education System

Three categories of projects have been developed based on their positionality towards the mainstream education system: *(a) life-long learning, (b) projects based inside of school focused on curriculum reform and pathways to adulthood, and (c) projects positioned outside the mainstream system (alternative education centres).*

Table 5 presents how categories match with the projects.

Table 5: Categories developed in connection to projects' position towards the mainstream education system

CRITERIA BASED ON 'POSITIONALITY'	CLUSTERS
Category 1: Social inclusion/life-long learning	PETE, TCPID, Speedpak, An Cosán (VCC)
Category 2: Based inside schools (curricular reform, pathways to adulthood)	TA 21, Aspire 2, Fast Track
Category 3: Positioned outside the mainstream system (Alternative education centres)	Cork Life Centre, iScoil

6. Identification of Project Clusters

In the final stage of the analysis, the projects were matched in pairs, resulting in three clusters of projects (see **Figure 1**). Patterns of similarities across the projects were acknowledged in previous stages of the analysis, while this stage involved a simple strategy of counting the number of times the same combination of projects emerged from the data.

Table 6 presents the matching process for each project across their project vision, aims and objectives, projects' activities, participants' age, and positionality towards the mainstream education system.

Table 6: Categories developed in the documentary analysis process

PROJECTS	EVENTUAL CLUSTER	VISION	AIMS/ OBJECTIVES	PROJECT ACTIVITIES	PARTICIPANTS' AGE	POSITIONALITY
Trinity Access 21	**Cluster 2 Curriculum reform/ diverse pathways to adulthood:** Trinity Access 21, Aspire 2, Fast Track Academy	**Category 2: Reaching full educational potential:** Trinity Access 21, Cork Life Centre, An Cosán (VCC)	**Category 2: Supported transition to adulthood:** Fast Track Academy, Aspire 2, Trinity Access 21	**Category 1: Mentoring/ Pathways to Adulthood:** Trinity Access 21, Aspire 2, Fast Track Academy, Cork Life Centre	**Category 1: Young people secondary school:** Trinity Access 21, Fast Track Academy, Aspire 2, iScoil, Cork Life Centre	**Category 2: Based inside schools (curricular reform, pathways to adulthood):** Trinity Access 21, Aspire 2, Fast Track
An Cosán VCC	**Cluster 1 Life-long learning/ social inclusion:** PETE, TCPID, Speedpak, An Cosán (VCC)	**Category 2: Reaching full educational potential:** Trinity Access 21, Cork Life Centre, An Cosán (VCC)	**Category 3: Social inclusion and independent living:** PETE, TCPID, Speedpak, An Cosán (VCC)	**Category 2: Training, support, and social inclusion:** PETE, Speedpak, iScoil, An Cosán (VCC), TCPID	**Category 2: Adults:** PETE, Speedpak, An Cosán (VCC), TCPID	**Category 1: Social inclusion/ life-long learning:** PETE, TCPID, Speedpak, An Cosán (VCC)
Preparation for Education, Training and Employment (PETE)	**Cluster 1 Life-long learning/ social inclusion:** PETE, TCPID, Speedpak, An Cosán (VCC)	**Category 3: Inclusion in employment/ community and development of skills:** PETE, Speedpak, TCPID	**Category 3: Social inclusion and independent living:** PETE, TCPID, Speedpak, An Cosán (VCC) Community Trust	**Category 2: Training, support, and social inclusion:** PETE, Speedpak, iScoil, An Cosán (VCC), TCPID	**Category 2: Adults:** PETE, Speedpak, An Cosán (VCC), TCPID	**Category 1: Social inclusion/ life-long learning:** PETE, TCPID, Speedpak, An Cosán (VCC)
Trinity Centre for People with Intellectual Disabilities (TCPID)	**Cluster 1 Life-long learning/ social inclusion:** PETE, TCPID, Speedpak, An Cosán (VCC)	**Category 3: Inclusion in employment/ community and development of skills:** PETE, Speedpak, TCPID	**Category 3: Social inclusion and independent living:** PETE, TCPID, Speedpak, An Cosán (VCC)	**Category 2: Training, support, and social inclusion:** PETE, Speedpak, iScoil, An Cosán (VCC), TCPID	**Category 2: Adults:** PETE, Speedpak, An Cosán (VCC), TCPID	**Category 1: Social inclusion/ life-long learning:** PETE, TCPID, Speedpak, An Cosán (VCC)

Table 6: Categories developed in the documentary analysis process (continued)

PROJECTS	EVENTUAL CLUSTER	VISION	AIMS/ OBJECTIVES	PROJECT ACTIVITIES	PARTICIPANTS' AGE	POSITIONALITY
Aspire 2	**Cluster 2 Curriculum reform/ diverse pathways to adulthood:** Trinity Access 21, Aspire 2, Fast Track Academy	**Category 1: Systemic educational inequality:** Aspire 2, Fast Track Academy, iScoil	**Category 2: Supported transition to adulthood:** Fast Track Academy, Aspire 2, Trinity Access 21	**Category 1: Mentoring/ Pathways to Adulthood:** Trinity Access 21, Aspire 2, Fast Track Academy, Cork Life Centre	**Category 1: Young people secondary school:** Trinity Access 21, Fast Track Academy, Aspire 2, iScoil, Cork Life Centre	**Category 2: Based inside schools (curricular reform, pathways to adulthood):** Trinity Access 21, Aspire 2, Fast Track
Fast Track Academy	**Cluster 2 Curriculum reform/ diverse pathways to adulthood:** Trinity Access 21, Aspire 2, Fast Track Academy	**Category 1: Systemic educational inequality:** Aspire 2, Fast Track Academy, iScoil	**Category 2: Supported transition to adulthood:** Fast Track Academy, Aspire 2, Trinity Access 21	**Category 1: Mentoring/ Pathways to Adulthood:** Trinity Access 21, Aspire 2, Fast Track Academy, Cork Life Centre	**Category 1: Young people secondary school:** Trinity Access 21, Fast Track Academy, Aspire 2, iScoil, Cork Life Centre	**Category 2: Based inside schools (curricular reform, pathways to adulthood):** Trinity Access 21, Aspire 2, Fast Track
Cork Life Centre	**Cluster 3 Alternative centre of education/ based outside of mainstream schools:** Cork Life Centre, iScoil	**Category 2: Reaching full educational potential:** Trinity Access 21, Cork Life Centre, An Cosán (VCC)	**Category 1: Holistic student-centred approach:** Cork Life Centre, iScoil	**Category 1: Mentoring/ Pathways to Adulthood:** Trinity Access 21, Aspire 2, Fast Track Academy, Cork Life Centre	**Category 1: Young people secondary school:** Trinity Access 21, Fast Track Academy, Aspire 2, iScoil, Cork Life Centre	**Category 3: Positioned outside mainstream system (Alternative education centres):** Cork Life Centre, iScoil
Speedpak Enhanced Skills Traineeship (Speedpak)	**Cluster 1 Life-long learning/ social inclusion:** PETE, TCPID, Speedpak, An Cosán (VCC)	**Category 3: Inclusion in employment/ community and development of skills:** PETE, Speedpak, TCPID	**Category 3: Social inclusion and independent living:** PETE, TCPID, Speedpak, An Cosán (VCC)	**Category 2: Training, support, and social inclusion:** PETE, Speedpak, iScoil, An Cosán (VCC), TCPID	**Category 2: Adults:** PETE, Speedpak, An Cosán (VCC), TCPID	**Category 1: Social inclusion/ life-long learning:** PETE, TCPID, Speedpak, An Cosán (VCC)
iScoil	**Cluster 3 Alternative centre of education/ based outside of mainstream schools:** Cork Life Centre, iScoil	**Category 1: Systemic educational inequality:** Aspire 2, Fast Track Academy, iScoil	**Category 1: Holistic student-centred approach:** Cork Life Centre, iScoil	**Category 2: Training, support, and social inclusion:** PETE, Speedpak, iScoil, An Cosán (VCC), TCPID	**Category 1: Young people secondary school:** Trinity Access 21, Fast Track Academy, Aspire 2, iScoil, Cork Life Centre	**Category 3: Positioned outside the mainstream system (Alternative education centres):** Cork Life Centre, iScoil

Appendix 2:

SOFT SKILLS QUESTIONNAIRE

**Evaluating Social Innovation
Ireland's Education Fund**

Understanding *You* and *Your* Involvement in This Programme

Dear Participant,

Thank you for participating in this study. We are interested in finding out about what type of things you think you have developed by participating in the Cork Life Centre's Programme. In particular, we are interested in learning about how Cork Life Centre has helped you with your personal, social and employment skills.

We would be very grateful if you would help us by answering a set of questions on these areas, which we estimate will take 15-20 minutes of your time. A staff member can help you if needed. Remember, there is no right or wrong answer to these questions - just think which answer seems right for you here and now.

Before you start, can you please fill in the following details:

Date of data collection: ___/___/___

Your Age: _____

Gender:

☐ Male

☐ Female

☐ Other

Nationality: _____

Please Insert your Unique Identifier Code _____

(Capital Letters Please)

(See Details below on how to complete)

Having a Unique ID code allows the researchers to track individual changes with you over time. By using a code that is unique to you, your identity is protected.

Your personal identification code is a combination of the following components:
• The initials of your mother's first name and maiden surname,
• The number of the month in which you were born (01 = January etc.) and the
• County Code in which you live, as found on Car Registrations. A full list of these registration codes are provided below.

EXAMPLE ID Code: If your mother's first and maiden surname is Sarah Higgins, and you were born on 4th of February 1991 and live in Dublin, your Unique ID Code would be as follows: SH02D

Please Note: If your mother's maiden surname includes Mc or O' or she has a double-barrelled surname please use the first letter of the surname only.

2

Code	County	Irish name	Local authority
C	Cork	Corcaigh	Cork City Council Cork County Council
CE	Clare	An Clár	Clare County Council
CN	Cavan	An Cabhán	Cavan County Council
CW	Carlow	Ceatharlach	Carlow County Council
D	Dublin	Baile Átha Cliath	Dublin City Council Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council Fingal County Council South Dublin County Council
DL	Donegal	Dún na nGall	Donegal County Council
G	Galway	Gaillimh	Galway City Council Galway County Council
KE	Kildare	Cill Dara	Kildare County Council
KK	Kilkenny	Cill Chainnigh	Kilkenny County Council
KY	Kerry	Ciarraí	Kerry County Council
L	Limerick	Luimneach	Limerick City and County Council
LD	Longford	An Longfort	Longford County Council
LH	Louth	Lú	Louth County Council
LM	Leitrim	Liatroim	Leitrim County Council
LS	Laois	Laois	Laois County Council
MH	Meath	An Mhí	Meath County Council
MN	Monaghan	Muineachán	Monaghan County Council
MO	Mayo	Maigh Eo	Mayo County Council
OY	Offaly	Uíbh Fhaili	Offaly County Council
RN	Roscommon	Ros Comáin	Roscommon County Council
SO	Sligo	Sligeach	Sligo County Council
T	Tipperary	Tiobraid Árann	Tipperary County Council
W	Waterford	Port Láirge	Waterford City and County Council
WH	Westmeath	An Iarmhí	Westmeath County Council
WX	Wexford	Loch Garman	Wexford County Council
WW	Wicklow	Cill Mhantáin	Wicklow County Council

1. Personal Development Skills: Coping and Resilience

This section asks you how you cope with different life situations. We would like you to think to what extent the statements below describe you. Responses include options "Not at all"; "A little"; "Somewhat"; "Quite a bit" and "A lot". Please, tick ONE answer only for each question. Remember there are no right or wrong answers – just state how you feel here and now, by putting an X in the correct choice for you.

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Quite a bit	A lot
1. I have people I look up to.					
2. I cooperate with people around me.					
3. Getting qualifications or skills is important to me.					
4. I know how to behave in different social situations.					
5. My family have supported me throughout my life.					
6. My family knows a lot about me.					
7. If I am hungry I have money to buy food.					
8. I try to finish what I start.					
9. Spiritual Beliefs are a source of strength for me.					
10. I am proud of my ethnic background.					
11. People think that I am fun to be around.					
12. I talk to my family/caregiver(s) about how I feel.					
13. I am able to solve problems without harming myself or others (for example by using drugs and/or being violent).					
14. I feel supported by my friends.					
15. I know where to get help in my community.					
16. I feel I belong at Cork Life Centre.					
17. My family stands by me in difficult times.					
18. My friends stand by me in difficult times.					
19. I am treated fairly in my community.					
20. I have opportunities to show others I can act responsibly.					

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Quite a bit	A lot
21. I am aware of my own strengths.					
22. I participate in organised religious activities.					
23. I think it is important to serve my community.					
24. I feel safe when I am with my family/caregivers.					
25. I have opportunities to develop skills that will be useful later in life (like job skills and skills to care for others).					
26. I enjoy my family's/caregiver's cultural and family traditions.					
27. I enjoy my community's traditions.					
28. I am proud of my nationality.					

2. Personal Development Skills: Self-esteem

Below is a list of statements asking you about how you feel in general about yourself. Please, tick ONE answer for each question, that best reflects how you feel. Remember there are no right or wrong answers to these statements. Just state how you feel here and now, by putting an X in the correct choice for you.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.				
2. At times I think I am no good at all.				
3. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.				
4. I am able to do things as well as most other people.				
5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.				
6. I certainly feel useless at times.				
7. I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.				
8. I wish I could have more respect for myself.				
9. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.				
10. I take a positive attitude toward myself.				

3. Personal Development Skills: Well-Being

Below is a list of statements asking you about your general well-being. We are interested in your opinion about your engagement in activities, relationships with other people, life purpose and how good you are in completing things. Please, give your honest opinion about each statement by circling the number that best describes your opinions. Remember there are no right or wrong answers.

1. In general, to what extent do you lead a purposeful and meaningful life?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Not at all   Completely

2. How much of the time do you feel you are making progress towards accomplishing your goals?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Never   Always

3. How often do you become absorbed in what you are doing?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Never   Always

4. In general, how would you say your health is?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Terrible   Excellent

5. In general, how often do you feel joyful?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Never   Always

6. To what extent do you receive help and support from others when you need it?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Not at all   Completely

7. In general, how often do you feel anxious?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Never   Always

8. How often do you achieve the important goals you have set for yourself?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Never   Always

9. In general, to what extent do you feel that what you do in your life is valuable and worthwhile?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Not at all   Completely

10. In general, how often do you feel positive?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Never   Always

11. In general, to what extent do you feel excited and interested in things?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Not at all   Completely

12. How lonely do you feel in your daily life?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Not at all   Completely

13. How satisfied are you with your current physical health?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Not at all   Completely

14. In general, how often do you feel angry?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Never   Always

15. To what extent have you been feeling loved?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Not at all   Completely

16. How often are you able to handle your responsibilities?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Never   Always

17. To what extent do you generally feel you have a sense of direction in your life?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Not at all   Completely

18. Compared to others of your same age and sex, how is your health?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Terrible   Excellent

19. How satisfied are you with your personal relationships?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Not at all   Completely

20. In general, how often do you feel sad?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Never   Always

21. How often do you lose track of time while doing something you enjoy?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Never   Always

22. In general, to what extent do you feel contented?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Not at all   Completely

23. Taking all things together, how happy would you say you are?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Not at all   Completely

4. Social Inclusion Skills: Belonging and Engagement

Below is a list of statements asking you about your feelings of belonging and engagement. Please, tick <u>ONE</u> answer for each question, which best reflects how you feel. Remember there are no right or wrong answers to these statements. Just state how you feel here and now, by putting an X in the correct choice for you.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I am motivated towards my studies.					
2. I feel at home at Cork Life Centre.					
3. I expect to do well on the centre's programme.					
4. Being on this programme is an enriching experience.					
5. I try to make connections between what I learn from different parts of this programme.					
6. I try to do a bit more on the centre's programme than it asks me to.					
7. I wish I'd gone to a different programme.					
8. I seek out Cork Life Centre's staff in order to discuss topics relevant to this centre's programme.					
9. I worry about the difficulty of the centre's programme.					
10. I put a lot of effort into the work I do.					
11. I have found Cork Life Centre to be welcoming.					
12. I use feedback on my work to help me improve what I do.					
13. I doubt my ability to study at the centre's programme level.					
14. I am shown respect by members of staff at Cork Life Centre.					
15. Sometimes I feel I don't belong here.					
16. I am confident of completing Cork Life Centre's programme successfully.					
17. I feel accepted for who I am at Cork Life Centre.					
18. I see myself as a leader.					

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
19. I have difficulty fitting in at Cork Life Centre.					
20. Other participants see me as a leader.					
21. I enjoy being at Cork Life Centre.					
22. I like challenging assignments.					
23. Cork Life Centre is boring.					
24. I enjoy participating on Cork Life Centre's programme.					
25. I enjoy learning new things.					
26. I learn new things that are interesting to me at the centre's programme.					
27. Learning can be fun.					
28. Participants have a voice in decision making at Cork Life Centre.					
29. Members of the staff at this centre listen to participants' suggestions.					
30. Staff members and participants work together to make Cork Life Centre better.					
31. Participants work with staff to find solutions to Cork Life Centre's problems.					
32. Participants develop ideas that improve the whole programme.					
33. At Cork Life Centre I am encouraged to be a good citizen.					
34. I have never been recognized for something positive at Cork Life Centre.					
35. Cork Life Centre helps me understand what is happening in my everyday life.					
36. I believe I can make a difference in this world.					
37. I have learned about how to plan and complete a project at the centre's programme.					

5. Social Inclusion Skills: Support and Mentoring

This section asks you about support that you might get at this programme. Thick <u>ONE</u> answer for each question which best reflects your opinion. Remember there are no right or wrong answers to these statements. Just state how you feel here and now, by putting an X in the correct choice for you.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. My tutors are there for me when I need them.					
2. Adults at Cork Life Centre listen to the participants.					
3. Most tutors at Cork Life Centre are interested in me as a person, not just as a participant.					
4. Overall, my tutors are open and honest with me.					
5. At Cork Life Centre, staff care about participants.					
6. I enjoy talking to the tutors here.					

5.1 Social Inclusion Skills: Support and Mentoring

The following two questions ask you about the extent of help and support you have received at this Programme. Remember there are no right or wrong answers - only your opinion counts!

1. A tutor is a person with more experience than you, who acts as an adviser and guide. Does Cork Life Centre have a programme, where people at the Centre (older participants and/or staff) or from outside the Centre (college students and/or outside experts) help participants become ready for college and/or a career?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Don't know

2. If you have received advice or support please select the type of tutor you have/had (Tick all that apply)

☐ Older participants from Cork Life Centre
☐ Cork Life Centre's staff members
☐ College students
☐ Outside experts
☐ Other (please specify) _____

6. Social and Employment Skills: Benefits of this Programme

In this section we would like you to think about the benefits of this Centre's Programme to you, in areas such as making new friends, development of new skills or building confidence. In general do you think that this Centre's Programme has benefited you in the ways described below? (Please, tick ONE answer for each question and remember there are no right or wrong answers). Just state how you feel here and now, by putting an X in the correct choice for you.

	Yes, a lot	Yes, some	No help
1. In increasing your self-confidence.			
2. In helping you develop into a well-balanced person.			
3. In building good relations with friends of the opposite sex.			
4. In being able to talk and communicate with others.			
5. In knowing how to go about finding things out for yourself.			
6. In helping you to make new friends.			
7. In knowing how to acquire a new skill.			
8. In getting involved in sports.			
9. In giving you reading and writing skills.			
10. In appreciating reading for pleasure.			
11. In preparing you for the world of work.			
12. In giving you computer skills.			
13. In preparing you for adult life.			
14. In helping you to think for yourself.			
15. In appreciating art or music.			
16. In helping you to decide what to do after you leave Cork Life Centre.			

7. Social and Employment Skills II

Below is a list of statements which refer to different skills that could be used at work or in life in general. On a scale from "Not at all confident" to "Very Confident" tick <u>ONE</u> answer for each question that best reflects your opinion. Remember there are no right or wrong answers. Just state how you feel here and now, by putting an X in the correct choice for you.

	Not at all confident	Not very confident	Neutral	Confident	Very confident
1. Work in pairs or small groups to complete a task together.					
2. Work with other participants to set goals and create a plan for your team.					
3. Create joint products using contributions from each participant.					
4. Communicate your ideas using media other than a written paper (e.g. posters, video, blogs, etc.).					
5. Prepare and deliver an oral presentation to a tutor or others.					
6. Answer questions in front of an audience.					
7. Test out ideas and work to improve them.					
8. Invent a solution to difficult problems.					
9. Create something new that can help you express your ideas.					

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Appendix 3:

SUMMARY OF THE ACTION PLAN 2017 GOALS

The DEIS Plan 2017 further lists the following positive developments since the introduction of the Action Plan 2005:

- Since the introduction of the programme, the reading and numeracy skills of pupils attending DEIS schools have hugely improved. These rates are particularly good in rural DEIS schools. Students from these schools sometimes outperform learners from rural non-DEIS schools. Their numeracy and literacy skills are at the same level as those of pupils from urban non-DEIS schools.

- Improved pupils' retention and attainment levels.

- Positive impact on schools' planning in general, in particular in areas such as attendance, literacy, numeracy, and partnership with parents.

- Retention rates to Leaving Cert in recent years have been significantly higher, increasing from 68.2% in 2001 to 82.7% in 2016 (DES, 2017, p. 15).

The new Plan (2017) develops around a new set of goals and objectives focusing on improving the DEIS programme:

Goal 1: Developing and implementing a new, more robust methodology for identifying DEIS schools and resource allocation

At present, 825 schools participate in the DEIS scheme, serving 170.000 pupils. The cost of the programme is €97.62 million. The current methodology does not encompass all schools in need of support. These schools may experience higher disadvantage than schools already in the programme. Therefore, a new methodology needs to be introduced. Also, a more effective system of resource allocation focused on specific school needs to be implemented. This system needs to ensure that the resources match schools' educational needs. For example, numeracy and literacy skills in band 1 schools remain low and require more targeted allocation of resources.

One of the main issues recognised by the DES is that it is hard to know what is happening in and around individual schools in terms of the effectiveness of interventions, which makes it hard to make further decisions on resource allocations. Good practices and a piloting approach should be used when developing a new School Support Programme to see what works best.

Goal 2: Improving learning experience and outcomes of pupils in DEIS schools

The DEIS support programme already provides support in areas such as financial assistance, grants, additional teaching resources, psychological and behavioural supports, access to Home School Community Liaison and School Completion Programmes, and access to the School Meals Scheme. The report recognises positive, good outcomes through a range of good practices, such as networking of DEIS schools, programmes focused on improving parental engagement, and engaging local business and community organisations in schooling and learning. However, this report recognises that further improvements are needed in the following areas (DES, 2017, p. 23–28):

- More support should be given to practices and innovations that work well.

- Schools should establish a goal-focused and targeted approach in their plans, e.g., self-evaluation approach, improving coordination and accountability of schools, and schools adopting more innovative approaches in tackling educational disadvantage.

- Behavioural issues in DEIS schools have been recognised as problematic. Therefore, a focus on programmes such as anti-bullying and codes of behaviour should be introduced to improve school climate in DEIS schools. Provision of behavioural supports in primary and post-primary schools.

- Supported transitions of young people at all education levels (i.e., preschool, primary, second, higher education).

- Increased literacy and numeracy supports.

- Improving and increasing psychological support services for teachers and pupils.

- Renewing support for the most vulnerable groups, e.g., pupils from minority groups (e.g., Roma and Travellers) and children at risk of disengagement.

Goal 3: To improve capacity of school leaders and teachers to engage, plan, and deploy resources to their best advantage

One of the key findings is 'the importance of school climate and the need to ensure that schools provide an environment which is conducive to successful engagement with education' (DES, 2017, p. 37). Schools need to provide support and well-being initiatives to enhance students' resilience and well-being, supporting family literacy, minority groups in education, and the development of knowledge and skills.

Goal 4: To support and foster best practice in schools through interagency collaboration

A whole-school approach needs to be promoted.

Goal 5: To support the work of schools by providing information, evidence, and evaluation to achieve the goals of the plan

Supports under the DEIS programme are positive, but what is happening at individual school level remains unknown.

Appendix 4:

SUMMARY OF LEARNING FROM REVIEW OF IRISH EDUCATION SYSTEM AND INTERNATIONAL ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROVISION

EDUCATION IN IRELAND	ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO EDUCATION
1. A theocentric paradigm with strong control by the Catholic Church was introduced in Ireland since the foundation of the Irish state: • **Catholic Church** effectively controlled education and decided what education should consist of (Gavin, 2004). **2. The Investment in Education Report (1965)** is regarded as the foundation of the modern Irish education system: • Education was career focused, concerned with channelling children into career paths • Introduction of a free education system. 3. Greater societal awareness and a more proactive **state intervention approach** was introduced in education in the 1990s: • The state ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1992) • The economic situation in the state improved and provided a chance to invest in education. **3.1 Green Paper (1992)** was introduced and aimed: • to place significant emphasis on education serving the needs of industry • to create educational environment which would equip students for life, work and citizen's participation • to focus on reducing disadvantage in schooling. Green paper established greater equity in the education system, but it lacked a clear vision on a type of society which the education system aimed to foster and develop (CPA, 1993: 12). **3.2 The 1995 White Paper on Education** ('Charting Our Education Future') was introduced to provide additional empowerment and policy direction for all partners in education. • Its policy focus was on achieving greater access to supports for disadvantaged schools, but it did not specify how this should be operationalised.	**1. Two philosophical roots** of alternative education, *progressive and libertarian,* are recognised in the literature (Wiseman, 2017: 8), but there is no agreed singular definition in place. **2.** It develops as **a response to state-provided mainstream education:** • Pedagogical aspects of education are key in responding to students' disengagement from learning. • Holistic approaches to education, integrating students' cognitive, metacognitive, and social-emotional development, are at the core of alternative programmes (Sliwka and Yee, 2015). **3. Key characteristics** of this type of education are: • Small classes focusing on innovative and experiential learning • One-to-one interaction between teachers and learners • A less hierarchical and bureaucratic environment based on more equal relationships between teaching staff and students. **4. Research shows there are positive outcomes of alternative programmes in the following areas:** • They help increase students' numeracy and literacy skills. • Learners can improve their engagement with studies, attendance, and disruptive behaviour. • Students' aspirations for learning and education improve in these settings. • Positive impact on learners' self-esteem, well-being, and resilience, and strengthened community engagement and pro-social behaviour. **5. Negative aspects of alternative education** can revolve around issues such as flexibility, quality, and accountability of the programmes. **6. Two perspectives to schooling,** *Youth at risk and Learning choice,* have led current approaches to alternative provision of education. **7. International practices in alternative provision of education** **7.1 USA:** • Alternative education has had a place in the US system of education for the last 40 years. • No clear agreement reached on the meaning of alternative education in the US. • Lack of public funding, and dependence on charities and philanthropies. • States which introduced alternative education follow a comprehensive legislation recognised under the name of: *Alternative Education, Schools, or Programs.* • A clear policy shift of alternative approaches, from progressive and democratic aspects of schooling to introduction of neoliberal policies in this field focusing predominantly on vulnerable young people.

EDUCATION IN IRELAND	ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO EDUCATION
3.3 The Education Act (1998) obliges the state to provide education to every person: • It focuses on inclusive education • It promotes partnership between schools, patron, students, teachers, and the wider community. **3.4 The Education Welfare Act (2000)** presents the legislative framework for compulsory school attendance and sets school leaving age to 16 years. • It provides for the introduction of regulated alternative education to encompass home schooling and the establishment of an Educational Welfare Board (EWB). **3.5 The DEIS Programme (2005)** aimed to create a standardised system used to identify and revise disadvantage. • It created a new integrated School Support Programme (SSP) designed to bolster and unite existing interventions for school clusters and communities with high levels of social and economic disadvantage. **3.6 DEIS Action Plan 2017** replaced the DEIS Programme 2005 to provide greater focus on the clarity of best practice. The following targets were introduced to further improve the DEIS programme: (1) increasing literacy and numeracy skills in DEIS schools; (2) improving retention rates at second-level education; (3) improving students' well-being; (4) increasing the number of young people from DEIS schools in further and higher education; (5) enhancing teacher education and professional development programmes to support the raising of expectations among students in relation to their higher education potential; (7) improving parents' engagement in schools; and (8) improving DEIS schools' links with business and wider communities (DES, 2017: 6–8).	**7.2 England** • Alternative education has been introduced to address the challenges faced by youth at risk. • The purpose of alternative education in English jurisdiction is defined by law which specifies that the purpose of alternative provision of education be focused on changing behaviour of at-risk young people. • It is the last-chance resort for young people who were excluded or are at risk of exclusion from school. • Alternative programmes are often criticised because of insufficient quality of programmes, inconsistency of the approaches used, cost of provision, inadequate monitoring, and lack of effective reintegration of young people in mainstream schools (Thomson, 2014). **7.3 Scotland** • Developed a different approach to mainstream and alternative education, following the idea of inclusion and equity. • The system does not envisage separate student referral units or a market of the provision of alternative education. • Local authorities and teachers unions have a strong role in creating education policy. • Scottish jurisdiction does not foresee a separated alternative provision of education, but rather focuses on 'inclusion units within the mainstream education which is governed by local authorities' (Pennacchia and Thomson, 2018) • Scotland has introduced *The Curriculum of Excellence 2010,* which develops around areas of: literacy, numeracy, health, and well-being. **7.4 Australia** • Alternative education refers to 'flexi' or second-chance schools, primarily catering for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds (Wiseman, 2017) • The origin of alternative education is in the progressive movement and the equity programmes; however, in the last decade the programmes have focused exclusively on disadvantaged young people (Te Riele et al., 2017). • The alternative sector of education is unregulated: most alternative schools and programmes sit outside of the state jurisdiction, but they are subsidised by the states and are required to follow governmental regulations. • 'Learning or earning' agenda was introduced in the last decade, which resulted in introduction of policies focused on flexible educational pathways. This agenda instigated interest from the state, philanthropy, and civil society in alternative education programmes. • The core policies in alternative education stem from the *National Partnership Agreement on Youth Attainment and Transitions* (2009). A neoliberal direction in Australian education policy has been taken in recent years: alternative education follows youth-at-risk approach rather than changing-schools approach.

EDUCATION IN IRELAND	ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO EDUCATION
	7.5 Germany • Reformist pedagogy has a long tradition in Germany. • Legislation focused on establishment of alternative schools is in place in all 16 states. • Lack of awareness about diversity in learning has been rooted in the German education system, in particular considering schooling of children from minority groups and pupils from lower socio-economic background. • Public discussion on the idea of good school started after average performance in PISA survey in 2000 (Sliwka and Yee, 2015). • Yet policy has responded to this issue by recognising student-centred and personalised approaches to learning, and encouraging a less-hierarchical and more cooperative work approach between teachers and students. • Traditional and reformist pedagogies have been gradually merged.