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SECTION 1
INTRODUCTION

SOCIAL INNOVATION FUND IRELAND

Social Innovation Fund Ireland was established by the Irish Government in 2013 to 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, Social Innovation Fund Ireland created the Education Fund in late 2017 as a way of confronting this 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, ten projects were chosen as recipients of the award. Eight are based in Dublin and two in Cork, while their impact reaches learners all over Ireland. Each offers a form of alternative education compared to the mainstream system.
Recognising the need for collaborative efforts to tackle educational disadvantage, Social Innovation Fund Ireland worked with partners on a process to advance dialogue and focus action. The result was the Gamechanger Dialogue. It was conceived and created within the Social Innovation Fund Ireland Education Fund, in partnership with the Teaching Council of Ireland, the National Association for Principals and Deputy Principals, and Trinity College Dublin.

On 8-10 May 2019 around 70 education innovators, stakeholders and policymakers gathered at the Burren College of Art in Ballyvaughan, County Clare to address a range of critical issues in the existing education system. The aim of the event was to build enduring strategic relationships that are centred around precise actions, and to share solutions to tackle systemic blockages and urgent problems that Ireland’s education system is currently facing.

The organisers set out to promote collaboration and inspire changes in the education system through four vehicles:

1. Showcasing to delegates a wide range of innovative solutions to social exclusion in education by inviting the nine current Education Fund grantee projects to present on their work.

2. Developing stakeholder comprehension and sensitivity to what is happening at the margins of society by hearing directly from projects and young people.

3. Building relationships between participants in order to explore possibilities for systemic improvements.

4. Supporting participants to work together in order to develop concrete actions to drive positive changes in the education system.
Participants from State institutions included representatives from the Department of Education and Skills, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, Tusla, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, Education and Training Board Ireland and the National Council for Special Education. A wide range of key stakeholders participated, including from education, children, parent and youth bodies as well as from trade unions and universities.

Throughout the three-day programme participants were facilitated in creating a safe, respectful and creative dialogue to explore issues relating to social exclusion in Ireland’s education system. The facilitation team of Chris Chapman, Valerie Jackman and Ali Warner used methods (based on Theory U and complex adaptive systems) that specifically set out to focus on personal realisation and sensitisation on the issues at hand, and within that, to establish and grow ongoing relationships between participants around these shared issues. One participant explained that “[t]his gathering of key stakeholders and innovators was unique in both its approach and outcome. The event encouraged and supported broad information sharing and deep collaboration as well as outside-of-the-box thinking that I feel could yield real outcomes to benefit student access”.

Each of the three days of the Gamechanger Dialogue were scheduled so that delegates had opportunities to listen, learn and participate in plenary group sessions and in three cluster group discussions. A key element in the design of the days was to establish a sense of equality between all participants, no matter their roles within the sector. The facilitation team scheduled a number of periods for participants to become comfortably acquainted, such as art and singing workshops and an organised walk through the Burren landscape specifically aimed to inspire informal yet targeted thought and conversation.

In plenary discussions on the first day, participants heard of in-depth commentary on international education policy perspectives from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the Ontario College of Teachers, and Anastasia Crickley, the former president of the UN Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD).

On the second day the conference heard from the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, based in the National University of Ireland Galway, as the centre has completed the first year of a three-year evaluation of Social Innovation Fund Ireland’s Education Fund. Also on that day, in a dialogue between learners and participants, the conference heard directly from learners about their experiences of education and their opinions about its future direction.
Delegates spent most of their time together working in three thematic cluster groups, which engaged in targeted areas of work to foster a more inclusive education system:

**Cluster 1: Pathways and Inclusion**
Establishing and supporting viable pathways to and through basic, further and higher education for people from marginalised communities.

**Cluster 2: Getting to College**
Improving educational progression rates within under-served communities, junior and senior cycle reforms, integrated working across departments and new partnerships.

**Cluster 3: Alternative Education**
Giving appropriate priority to young people not in mainstream schools, building on models that work and exploring the potential for funding to follow the young person.

Throughout these three days, participants worked creatively in these groups to deeply consider issues that are ‘stuck’ in our education system. They moved on to identifying potential moments or areas that they described as ‘acupuncture points’ (producing actions that might clear a blockage), and ways to move forward together in these areas through the development of cohesive action plans. A particular focus was placed on participants’ awareness of the moment within their cluster discussions and activities that allowed particular proposals to emerge (their ‘acupuncture points’).

“..."The value of collaboration should never be underestimated: this event gave me such motivation as I understood that so many others shared the same goals and values”
— Participant

**CROSS-CUTTING THEMES EMERGING IN THE GAMECHANGER DIALOGUE**

A number of cross-cutting themes emerged throughout the three days, which included:

1. **Parity of Esteem** — the need for greater equality of regard and esteem across the education system, including between teachers, students, parents and communities, and between mainstream education and alternative education. Participants spoke of the need to break down existing ‘them and us’-type barriers to enable everyone involved in education to engage with each other on an equal basis, and to ensure that learners are placed at the centre of the system.

2. **Education as a Human Right** — the legally binding obligations found in international treaties that Ireland is party to, and Article 42 of the Irish Constitution, enshrine the right to education and the responsibility of the State to provide for it. As such, those involved in developing and delivering education can be viewed, and are accountable under these obligations, as duty bearers. Participants spoke about how approaching education as a right for all learners empowers all those working in the system to overcome seemingly entrenched barriers.

3. **Care and Wellness** — the issues pertaining to the care and wellness of learners, teachers, families and communities, and all across the educational system, need urgent attention. Issues of care and health, particularly mental health, were repeated throughout the conference. The various and intersecting pressures of operating within the education system were seen to contribute to ill health. Framing these issues as causing negative effects for both adults and children was seen as key to improving health for all.
4 Embracing Change in Education — learning and pedagogical changes incorporate remote learning technologies, new approaches, lifelong learning and alternative education centres. Much discussion took place on the issue of mainstreaming innovative approaches: for example, rather than seeing it as the duty of the providers who work on the margins to incorporate with mainstream provision, a strong sense emerged among the Gamechanger Dialogue participants that the underpinning understanding of the education system should itself already be inclusive of those on the margins and the provision they require to access appropriate education.

5 Collaboration — as a vehicle for organising for sustainable reform of the system. This includes using existing networks and developing new ones. It was widely agreed that work to change the system needs to be approached in partnership with the relevant stakeholders. Participants highlighted existing networks of supports that could be utilised by more organisations, and also discussed how actions emerging from the Gamechanger Dialogue provide a platform for further collaboration.

6 Overhauling Assessment of Learning — including reform of the senior cycle and increasing opportunities for alternative and lifelong learning. Participants stated that the present focus on the CAO points system is not working for too many learners (for example, only 13% of Travellers are recorded as completing the Leaving Certificate in 2018). An overhaul of assessment of learning across the system would also include revitalised pathways to further education, and consideration of how teachers’ training is assessed.

“This event enabled a much needed discussion about crucial societal topics by bringing together all key actors in the area of education. Respect, dialogue and appreciation for other people’s views and experiences were key drivers of this event. Walking the Burren, discussing and thinking made this event special!”

– Participant

THIS GAMECHANGER DIALOGUE REPORT

This document has two functions:

1. To report on discussions from the event.
2. To present the actions across three focus areas identified by participants.

The first chapter presents discussions and key points that emerged in plenary sessions. These include international perspectives, perspectives from learners, and insights from Education Fund evaluators. The following three chapters are based on the three thematic cluster areas. They will draw on presentations from projects, conclusions from plenaries and rich discussion in three cluster groups. Importantly, these chapters summarise the action points from each cluster. A matrix of the action points can be found in section 6 of this report. The conference agenda is reproduced in the appendices.
INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES
(PLENARY SESSION)

During this plenary session, participants heard international perspectives on education. Key concepts and examples raised here were carried into discussions across the three days.

Anastasia Crickley
*Former Chairperson of UN Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and founder of Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre*

Anastasia Crickley spoke of the problem with discussing educational ‘disadvantage’ and proposed that greater emphasis be placed on framing education as a human right. In her talk, she highlighted primacy of this right in core State documents such as the 1916 Proclamation of Independence and the Irish Constitution of 1937, and the widespread legally binding international obligations under international law that are currently active, especially stressing Article 28 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child that overtly specifies the right and lays out measures that States need to ensure.¹

The presenter elaborated on the concepts of ‘rights holders’ and ‘duty bearers’ when it comes to the right to education, and posited a key point that everyone involved in the development and delivery of education, including participants in the conference and not just Government, can be seen as a ‘duty bearer’.

The Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) – “[t]o ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” – validates the concept of people having a right to access education throughout their life cycle. This is an approach that would better support learners to enter and exit the system in response to the reality of their lives. She specifically drew attention to lone parents and members of the Traveller community, for whom the present emphasis on the Leaving Certificate is not working. She also spoke about how intersectionality applies here: how it is often the interplay of, for example, gender and disability that marginalises learners. To ensure equity of access, such interplays require special measures within

¹ Other human rights treaties (or covenants) that Ireland has ratified include the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD).
and alongside the education system. One size does not fit all and treating everybody the same can ignore their marginalisation and systemic exclusion. Crickley spoke of how the Department of Education’s focus on mainstreaming with its undeniable potential for inclusion and integration has to be matched with special measures to create a level ‘playing field’ with the potential for realizing such inclusion and integration and these special measures need parity of esteem and recognition throughout the system.

Anastasia Crickley also spoke of the need for greater parity of esteem between policymakers, teachers, learners, families and communities – a theme that re-emerged throughout the event. Here she spoke about learning from youth and community work, where core principles emphasise parity and equality between practitioners and the communities in which they work. Delegates heard about the work of the Department of Applied Social Studies at Maynooth University to support members from marginalised communities to become the community workers within their communities. The conference also heard about the need for education to lead to meaningful jobs and opportunities.

Marc Fuster
Policy Analyst, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

Marc Fuster spoke about the OECD’s Trends Shaping Education project. This project considers how global trends (social, environmental, technological, demographic, etc) affect education, and how education can affect these trends. He gave examples of more environment-friendly behaviours such as recycling that might be, at least partially, a successful story about education for sustainability. He spoke about the need for the education system to understand the wider context of children and adolescents, and work together with social services and local communities to ensure the development of integral interventions that address the underlying causes of poverty and marginalisation for students experiencing social exclusion. In this context, he also spoke about the importance of learning beyond formal learning time and schooling settings. He discussed the need to connect teaching to the real-life context of students and the importance of finding ways to leverage the link between leisure, learning and wellbeing.

Fuster shared learning about how opportunities that bring together students, schools and their communities, such as service-learning, can help disadvantaged students compensate for early experiences of inequity in the system. Service-learning, he said, increases students’ self-efficacy and self-esteem, provides students with more meaningful learning experiences, helps them build their social network and raises their sense of belonging to the school, with the potential to eventually increase retention and performance.

As the effects of policy interventions might vary across communities given the complex environments schools are embedded in, educational authorities should thus:

1. Be prepared to offer different support alternatives across different contextual needs.
2. Engage in experimentation both at systemic and local level to see and learn from what works best in each context.
3. Design comprehensive interventions taking into account capacity needs on the ground in order to implement intended policies, such as opportunities for teachers to develop their pedagogical knowledge and emotional competence, particularly at the earlier career stages where individuals familiarise with the profession. Ireland is starting to experience teacher shortages due to austerity policies and demographic pressure, and interventions are needed to support and retain teachers.

Michael Salvatori
Registrar and CEO of the Ontario College of Teachers, Canada

The Ontario College of Teachers is the regulator of the teaching profession in Ontario, Canada. It was established in 1997 to support teachers to join doctors, nurses and other groups in self-regulation, acknowledging teachers as autonomous professionals.
Salvatori spoke about the impact of reforming initial teacher education (doubling the length of training, increasing in-field learning and articulating core content areas), and continuous professional development through additional qualification courses. These changes were framed as preparing teachers for ‘teaching in the 21st century’.

The content of teacher training was changed in Ontario in 2015 to include an explicit emphasis on the involvement of parents in school and to prepare teachers for an increasingly diverse society. Core content for every teacher education programme now includes learning about diversity of family type, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation and gender identity. It further includes training about mental health, including addiction, and indigenous histories and cultures. Although many programmes would have focused on these themes, the 2015 review articulated clearly the core content for all programmes.

Of particular significance to the Gamechanger Dialogue, Salvatori spoke of how teachers are now given training focused on non-traditional transitional pathways for students. These pathways include routes to vocational education and the world of work, and prepare teachers to work with students who might take a more circuitous route to third level education.

The Ontario College of Teachers worked in partnership with teacher education institutions to develop standards and measures in order to ensure that these institutions are meeting the requirements they set. In doing so, Salvatori told the conference that they secured expert advice, as well as ownership and acceptance, from the bodies that are being regulated.

To support teachers who qualified before these 2015 changes, the Ontario College of Teachers developed a suite of diversity-focused additional qualification courses, and it issues regular professional advisory materials, for example on mental health and wellness.

**UNESCO CHILD AND FAMILY RESEARCH CENTRE**

National University of Ireland Galway

From the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, Dr Cormac Forkan, Professor Pat Dolan and Dr Tanja Kovacic presented a snapshot of the evaluation methodology being implemented across the Education Fund. The methodology has been designed to establish models of excellence among the awardees in overcoming inequality in education. In particular, over the three years of the evaluation the team will focus on establishing which projects have achieved the ‘gold standard’ by supporting their participants to progress from QQI Levels 3 to 6, the primary focus of the Education Fund.

In the executive summary of the end of year 1 Evaluation report, *Identifying Innovative Models for Supporting Vulnerable Learners Achieve Educational Progression: Early Findings from an Evaluation of Social Innovation Fund Ireland’s Education Fund*, the team presented some key high-level findings from year 1. Drawn from across the nine projects, five distinct and key messages have emerged regarding the benefits of the respective projects to learners:

1. **Alternative Ways of Learning** (various ways of learning, and learner-led, self-directed)
2. **Mentorship is Key** (invaluable role, self-worth)
3. **Focus on Personal Development Skills** (focus on life and self-skills, independence)
4. **Caring and Supportive Relationships with Staff and other Learners** (support, sense of community)
5. **Projects as Sanctuaries** (appropriate settings for this work, safe)
The authors also described the fundamental importance of soft skills and how these were identified at the initial meeting held with awardee projects, Social Innovation Fund Ireland and the evaluation team. The hypothesis was that to successfully support a participant to secure a QQI level 3–6 qualification, the projects often needed to help participants bolster their soft skills in three areas: personal development skills, social inclusion skills, and social and employment skills. For awardees, these non-cognitive soft skills were concepts such as a sense of worth, belonging, or self-esteem.

At the international level, the authors cite examples of alternative learning as based on small class-size, innovative/experiential learning, one-to-one interactions, less hierarchy and more equality, yielding positive results for numeracy, literacy and attendance. In Germany, Canada, Singapore and Finland the educational systems have introduced student-centred approaches to the pedagogy of learning. Further, the authors described ‘emancipatory research’: an approach that combines top-down with bottom-up research, with researchers intentionally focusing their attention on producing applicable and credible data.

**LEARNERS IN DIALOGUE PANEL**

A central objective of the Gamechanger Dialogue was to develop within each of the delegates an understanding of what is happening at the margins of society by hearing directly from young people. On the second day, a session for all conference participants focused on dialogue between learners and stakeholders.

The session took place in the gallery of the college and using visuals of boats on the walls with a defined watermark, participants were invited to reflect on what is working well and position it on Post-Its above the watermark. They were then asked to consider challenges and items that need to be addressed, and again using the simple Post-It method they positioned these envisaged challenges on the wall below the watermark. In response to what they saw on the walls, a panel of learners and stakeholders were facilitated in a powerful dialogue and questions-and-answers session.
Challenges identified by the panel included a shared acknowledgment that the system is too rigid and needs to be more flexible to ensure full participation from all learners. As an example of this, delegates heard how difficult it is for learners to reintegrate back to education once they have left.

Described as “the elephant in the room”, much discussion occurred regarding the Leaving Certificate and how the present format isn’t working for too many. Learners spoke about how unfair it is for young people’s futures to be so reliant on a single set of exams, and how “the points system isn’t preparing young people for being adults”. Concerns about anxiety and the mental health impact of the current assessment process were expressed and discussed. The conference heard that if project work and real-life experience were part of the transition from school to college then there would be less need for other supports and greater progression rates from under-served communities.

In terms of what is working well, the panel expressed appreciation for the passion and commitment to equality of people working across the system. This was demonstrated by the willingness of conference participants to take the time to work creatively and to listen to learners. It was noted that this expressed a willingness to collaborate and be creative.

Regarding the identification of ways forward in ensuring that no learner is left behind because of system failures, discussion emerged about the use of existing structures, such as the Children and Young People’s Services Committees, to further the work of inclusion in education. To this end, the conference heard that stronger participation in existing processes and greater collaboration between the various services, advocates and stakeholders is possible and this is an opportune time for work in this area.

Senior cycle reform, particularly the NCCA’s review of the senior cycle, offers a vital opportunity to further the changes identified by learners and stakeholders. This consultation process is currently underway and as such this is a propitious moment. Describing it as a “consolidated” idea, one delegate appealed for an amalgamated effort to ensure the possibility is realised.

“The Gamechanger event provided a real opportunity to feel and witness the passion that exists in our country to do the best we possibly can for every single person within our education system; pupil, learner, teacher and policy-maker alike”

— Participant
The guiding question in the cluster group was:

*How can we provide alternatives for young people who are not in mainstream school and what is needed to achieve this?*

The focus of this cluster area was on giving appropriate priority to young people who are not in mainstream school. Presentations delivered by two projects that directly addressed this guiding question, Cork Life Centre and iScoil, informed the subsequent cluster dialogue.

**CORK LIFE CENTRE**

From serving five learners in 2005 to over 55 in 2018 (turning away over 100 applicants that same year), Cork Life Centre (CLC) supports young people who have not been able to reach their potential in mainstream educational settings. It employs a Service Volunteered for All (SERVOL) model, with three key approaches: 1) ‘philosophy of ignorance’ – asking and not presuming what is best for each learner, 2) attentive listening in order to enable self-learning, and 3) respectful intervention – developing programmes with learners’ full consent and understanding. They spoke of the need for more accurate profiles of educational ‘early-school leavers’ and argued for a funding-following-the-student model.

**iSCOIL**

iScoil is an online learning community for young people aged 13-16 in which the education programme is tailored to the needs, interests and abilities of each individual young person, and for which all referrals come from TUSLA. As part of their presentation, iScoil highlighted that half of Ireland’s prison population left school before the age of 15. The conference heard how iScoil provides flexible, personalised learning plans prepared daily by mentors and course tutors, and the programme is underpinned by continuous assessment, interest-led learning, multiple models of assessment and synchronous support. Demand for iScoil’s service is growing and during the 2018/19 academic year 67 Tusla home-based referrals were turned down, as were a significant number of requests from youth services and agencies that wanted to set up blended learning centres for young people out of school in their communities.

**KEY ISSUES**

Key issues that emerged from Cork Life Centre and iScoil’s inputs that carried into the cluster discussions included:

- How mainstream education can learn from the approaches used by these organisations – including innovative learner-led education and the advanced use of technology.
- ‘Funding following the learner’.
- Building a greater understanding of learners who don’t fit into the existing mainstream school system, moving beyond traditional images of who early school leavers are.
THE CLUSTERS

Rich discussion occurred across the three days in the Alternative Education Cluster group.

On the first day facilitator Valerie Jackman used a process known as a 'warm data lab' to assist participants to consider alternative education in an ever-changing world from the perspectives of wellbeing, family, politics, children and funding. Participants were encouraged to engage in conversations from as many of these perspectives as possible. The purpose of this activity was to encourage generative dialogue and broaden perspectives.

This theme of living through change, described as 'liquid times', permeated discussions around issues of uncertainty and in terms of envisaging a set of highest future possibilities for learners. Participants discussed what alternative education can teach mainstream education, particularly around the high level of trust placed on learners, co-designing the curriculum and a strong emphasis on technology and innovation. Participants heard how alternative education excels at supporting learners to develop positive relationships and life skills, and to equip them for the complexity of life in these times.

On the second day the facilitator focused on communication and problem-solving techniques. Drawing on their own experience and what was discussed in the first gathering, participants were asked to build a model of how they see alternative education and, using metaphor, use the model they have built to share their story.

Participants spoke about how, at present, students are falling through the cracks, with around 1,000 students not transitioning from primary school to secondary school.

Much discussion occurred about describing this education as ‘alternative’, with concern expressed that the language can be marginalising, and that diversity of approaches and learners should be the norm. In reality, however, this work is happening on the margins of the system and consideration was given to how it could become more normalised and central to the education system. Both mainstreaming alternative education through its inclusion in existing schools and supports, and expanding our shared understanding of the education system so as to include alternative education organisations, were discussed in detail.
The theme of parity of esteem featured heavily in cluster discussions. This included a focus on how to work to create a greater parity of esteem between students, teachers, families and communities. It also included discussions on parity of esteem between mainstream and alternative education, including in financial resourcing. The cluster heard that this could be partially achieved through a system of ‘funding following the student’: the cost of maintaining a student in mainstream education is around €9,000, so similar resources should follow students into alternative education.

The cluster discussed what were described as "some hard truths" about the education system as a whole, such as how social and economic class is embedded in the system – including in how the vital work of vocational educational and training is seen, and how the current Leaving Certificate’s points system vastly disadvantages working-class students.

On the third and final day this group was asked to build a shared model of the system, using key components from the individual models. Participants then worked with a template to develop action points that could be worked on immediately. The energy in this gathering was tangible and the participants created five action points and plans for how to initiate and sustain these actions.

**ACTION POINTS**

On the final day of the Gamechanger Dialogue, the alternative education cluster focused on developing five key action points that can be immediately initiated:

1. Alternative education providers to be named in all political party manifestos for the next general election.
2. Develop a collaborative and evidence-based approach to promoting a ‘funding following the student’ model.
4. Find out the number of students on reduced hours and why this is the case by June 2020.
5. Call ‘Angelic Trouble-Makers’ (‘ATMs’): opening minds to creative alternative education.
6. Put students on board of management of schools (student voice).

In identifying these actions, participants highlighted a vision for inclusion in the area, the challenges faced, and the structure or vehicle needed to deliver the change. They also established who the relevant stakeholders are and committed to working together further to realise the changes.

“The event and location gave us the time and space to step out of our respective corners of education, have a meaningful dialogue about what positive change is needed and take the first steps together before leaving. It was hugely encouraging”

— Participant
The guiding question in the cluster group was:

*How can we support young learners with their journey to further and higher education?*

The focus of this Getting to College Cluster was on identifying how young people can be supported into further and higher education. During a plenary session, three projects presented the conference with their approaches to supporting young people into further education: Aspire2, Trinity Access 21, and the Fast Track Academy.

**ASPIRE2**

Aspire2 is a collaborative partnership between DPS global consulting, engineering and construction management company, students, schools, and key stakeholders from the education sector. The vision of the Aspire2 programme is to redress the systemic inequality in Irish education by supporting students who live in areas of educational disadvantage in order to increase their prospects of completing the Leaving Certificate and progressing to third-level education. They described to conference delegates how this is done through mentoring, youth advisory panels and the formation of alumni groups.

**TRINITY ACCESS 21**

Trinity Access 21 is an innovative university-led school outreach programme that empowers students, supports 21st-century learning environments, and strengthens ‘college-going’ cultures in DEIS schools. They demonstrated to conference delegates how this is achieved through supporting teachers to empower active learners, promoting pathways to college, and providing mentoring opportunities through relatable role models.

**THE FAST TRACK ACADEMY**

The Fast Track Academy (City Wise Education and TUD Tallaght Campus) develops academic and social skills through a tailored teaching support, mentoring, career guidance and work placements to improve numbers of students in west Tallaght progressing to third-level education. In their presentation to the conference they spoke about the effectiveness of this approach for individuals otherwise blocked from getting to college.

**THE CLUSTER**

The Gallery Space of the Burren College of Art allowed for the visual display of outputs from conversations and processes from this cluster over the three days, which enabled participants to see ‘the system’, their location in it and what can be built upon. Consideration was given to perspectives not represented in the room to ensure a fuller view of the whole system.
Participants considered the system in terms of:

- ‘Feelings and relationships’ – particularly ensuring child-centred approaches.
- ‘Truth and action’ – including the reality of inequality in education and society.
- ‘Barriers and bottlenecks’ – such as assessment models that don’t work for many learners.
- ‘Purpose’ – looking at replacing a one-size-fits-all approach with a fully inclusive and collaborative approach to learning.

The sessions facilitated by Chris Chapman were designed so that a multitude of diverse voices could be heard and recognised. This approach encouraged collective sense-making in the room and generated some agreement on potential areas for future action. Further, this facilitation tangibly acted to support relationship-building among the stakeholders present, all of whom carry varying perspectives and experience. It was designed to allow for an element of surprise, whereby participants are exposed to and appreciate new and other perspectives, and they collectively find ways of working collaboratively.

For the second cluster session, participants broke into small groups and used craft materials to construct models of the current reality and a desired future of the system. This enabled them to better envisage and identify key differences and key aspects of potential paths to transformation. From this point of overview, the group was effectively able to identify places from which change could be leveraged (known as acupuncture points), and they energetically identified specific initiatives that they would collectively like to see taken forward.

The ‘acupuncture points’ that were located and then considered as to how well they worked or what changes are required included: networking and collaboration, senior cycle reform, continuous professional development (also referred to as teacher learning), reforming student grant schemes, working to influence policy-making, and a stronger student voice. In translating each of these points into measurable actions, a shared vision emerged among Cluster 2 participants of how to collectively generate a more cohesive and inclusive systemic shift.

**ACTION POINTS**

On the final day of the Gamechanger Dialogue, the Getting to College Cluster focused on developing five key action points that can be immediately initiated:

1. Student grant reform: organise a think-tank/initial meeting to start discussion with key stakeholders.
2. Review higher education admissions systems: draft a paper on alternatives, including recognition of prior learning and experience (RPLE).
3. Senior cycle reform: develop a channel of communication with NCCA and trade unions.
4. Support school and community leadership.
5. Develop proposal to promote teacher learning (continuous professional development) across the system, including mapping what already exists.
The guiding question in the cluster group was:

What pathways are available to disadvantaged young people, and how can existing pathways be more inclusive?

During a plenary session, four of the Social Innovation Fund Ireland Education Fund projects (VCC, PETE, Trinity Centre for People with Intellectual Disabilities, and Speedpak Group) presented their perspectives on the benefits and disadvantages of existing education pathways and how they can become more inclusive.

**VCC**

An Cosán VCC (Virtual Community College) has developed an innovative entry-level model of higher education aimed at isolated and disadvantaged communities (in particular lone mothers) who want to make first steps into higher education, or to enter education at any level. Presenters described how they offer 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.

**PETE**

PETE from Focus Ireland is an education programme that aims to provide support to adults who have reached out to homeless services, in order to facilitate the journey of homeless people into mainstream education, training or employment. In this session, PETE described how its tailored education model is adapted to the individual by providing training to address gaps in a curriculum vitae.

**TRINITY CENTRE FOR PEOPLE WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES**

Trinity Centre for People with Intellectual Disabilities provides an advanced education programme for young people with intellectual disabilities to enable them to make the transition, and overcome the intersecting blocks, to employment and/or further education and to lead more independent adult lives. The centre described how it works with 24 business partners and has secured 13 placements for workplace experience. It aims to help learners achieve a Level 5 (LC) in arts and sciences, and presenters articulated the need for sustainable statutory support rather than philanthropy.

**SPEEDPAK GROUP**

Speedpak Group operates commercial businesses to support people in getting back to work by providing real work experience, accredited industry training, mentoring and tailored supports in Dublin city’s Northside. As Speedpak described in this session, the combination of trading and training transforms local lives: it provides greater financial independence and job resilience through education (while on a placement, young people can gain skills for their CV and an industry-led certificate).

**CLUSTER DISCUSSION**

This cluster group was facilitated across the three days by Ali Warner, using methods adapted from the Presencing Institute’s body of work that are designed to help a system see itself and to create the best possible space for transformative conversations.
On the first day the group were invited to step into the shoes of the roles they held within the education system, and to notice their embodied experience as they stood in a representative place in the middle of the group. Participants expressed what they felt in their part of the system.

The need to approach education from a life-long learning perspective was discussed in the room, with delegates discussing how to support people to join education in a way that works for them later in life. It was suggested that this would involve valuing various forms of further education. It was also suggested that we must look to accreditations that employers value so as to support people to move from education into meaningful employment.

Discussions also occurred about how can we educate Government to understand what education means to people with a disability. Here the issue of collaboration and communications was raised – which carried through the three days of talks.

On the second day the group used these found objects to create a map of the system and discussed the roles played by civil servants, politicians, teachers, learners and families. In this discussion the need for research and data was again expressed as was the need to promote equality and diversity across the system.

A frustration at the slow pace of policy implementation across Irish public policy was expressed, as was a desire to create an urgency when it comes to supports for learners who are not in mainstream education.

The need for greater collaboration between projects working on the margins was also discussed – including advocating to Government and communicating the work and issues through the media and to the public.
Urgent concern was expressed for educators who work outside of the mainstream, particularly due to the effects of the recession and their lack of pensions and secure terms and conditions. Projects are being led by passionate people who are frustrated around securing funding to keep services going. Here the issue of parity of esteem between mainstream and alternative educators and education settings was raised, with one participant saying “I wish the formal system would stand with us”. Participants expressed “exhaustion” at the work needed to maintain services.

A discussion was had about whether the Government was ignoring the informal sector or whether people were just not aware of what Government was doing – there were some voices in the group that stated that the Government was working hard in the area and was willing to listen and collaborate.

On the third and final day the group first worked collectively on changing their found object system map to represent the system they would most like to be part of from now on. They then gathered into sub-teams to generate the initial action steps that could have the greatest potential to help the system move towards this desired state.

**ACTION POINTS**

On the final day of the Gamechanger Dialogue, the Pathways and Inclusion Cluster focused on developing four key action points that can be immediately initiated:

1. Plot a revival of vocational education to value a range of pathways and involve industry.
2. Mobilise lateral channels to organise a central message: this could include campaigning issues on increased financial investment in early education, and financial support for accessing further/higher education for single parents.
3. Bring alternatives into the mainstream via a universal design of learning.

“The Gamechanger Dialogue in education event was exactly as it promised – an opportunity to change the dialogue in education. “Leave no one behind” was a stand out comment for me from the three days and an aspiration that with the will and cross-sectorial support is very possible”

— Participant
Clear action points were formed across all three clusters, which are outlined below. Various participant stakeholders committed to working collaboratively in order to realise the actions.

Social Innovation Fund Ireland is committed to exploring avenues towards sustaining collaborative efforts to further equality in education. This includes the setup of a Gamechanger Network hosted by a third-party body to coordinate and facilitate these action points.

GAMECHANGER DIALOGUE ACTION POINTS

(Further detail on each action point is available on request)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTION POINT</th>
<th>VISION – our highest potential</th>
<th>VEHICLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CLUSTER 1 – ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Quality alternative education providers to be named in all political party manifests for the next general election</td>
<td>Sustainable education provision for 12-18 year-olds based on need.</td>
<td>Working group from the Gamechanger Dialogue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Develop a collaborative and evidence-based approach to promoting a ‘funding following the student’ model</td>
<td>Learner is supported to access the most appropriate learning environment for them.</td>
<td>Working group from the Gamechanger Dialogue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Support a community of practice among quality alternative education providers</td>
<td>Sustainable supports for quality alternative education providers for organising and sharing practice.</td>
<td>Existing providers with support from Gamechanger Dialogue networks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CLUSTER 1 – MAINSTREAM SYSTEM ACTIONS ON AE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Find out the number of students on reduced hours and why this is the case by June 2020</td>
<td>Developing knowledge to investigate changes and patterns. Greater equality in the system.</td>
<td>A steering group to scope, manage and motivate targeted research group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 Calling ‘Angelic Trouble-Makers’ (‘ATMs’)</td>
<td>Lubricating the educational system. Opening minds to creative alternative education.</td>
<td>Enlist co-workers and associates through mediums such as coffee clubs and the online T-Rex platform (Teacher Research Expertise Exchange).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6 Put students on board of management of schools (student voice)</td>
<td>Student voices are heard, valued and responded to in matters relating to their education.</td>
<td>Existing boards of management and student councils.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACTION POINT</td>
<td>VISION – our highest potential</td>
<td>VEHICLE</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CLUSTER 2 – GETTING TO COLLEGE</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2.1 Student grant reform: organise a think tank/initial meeting to start discussion with key stakeholders</strong></td>
<td>Anyone can fully participate in higher education, regardless of financial background or mode of study, in ways that fully meet financial needs. Flexible fluid system – proactive/supportive. Enacted legislation that extends the grant system.</td>
<td>Equity of access plan, developed by a steering group from the Gamechanger Dialogue. Work with policy makers, Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI), relevant Government departments (currently Department of Employment and Social Protection (DESP) and Department of Education and Skills (DES)).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2.2 Reviewing higher education admissions systems: draft a paper on alternatives, including recognition of prior learning and experience (RPLE)</strong></td>
<td>A fair and equitable higher education admissions system that enables more people to reach their full potential. Space for second level to be less exam-driven and more creative (RPL and RPE). Diversity of entry routes, an outcome that validates alternatives.</td>
<td>Steering group from Gamechanger Dialogue. Senior cycle reform and NCCA consultation processes. Hyland Report convenings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2.3 Senior cycle reform – develop channel of communication with National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) and trade unions</strong></td>
<td>Overcome barriers to senior cycle reform (SCR). Support from teacher unions. Help influence reform process to be inclusive of everyone. Untangling inequality.</td>
<td>Facilitate a trade union/SCR think-tank event. Discuss UNESCO and cluster paper with trade unions. Discuss UNESCO report with NCCA leadership. Discuss report of Gamechanger Dialogue with NCCA and Department of Education and Skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2.4 Support school and community leadership</strong></td>
<td>Community supporting the endeavours of the school. Cohesion towards agreed goals – school serving community. Eliminate competition and encourage collaboration between schools.</td>
<td>Community engagement strategy. Aspiring Leaders Programme. National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD) and Irish Primary Principals’ Network (IPPN). Embed participatory practice. Continue to invest in Centre for School Leadership (CSL) and expand its services. Explore how to model community. Engagement with HEA and Tusla. Forum to encourage community involvement driven by the community.</td>
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</table>
## ACTION POINT

### CLUSTER 2 – GETTING TO COLLEGE (CONTINUED)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTION POINT</th>
<th>VISION – our highest potential</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **2.5 Develop proposal to promote teacher learning (continuous professional development) across the system including mapping what already exist.** | Recognition of the role of CPD – seeing benefits for their pupils. 
Education is framed as lifelong learning. 
Real sense of teacher agency and autonomy. 
Linked to financial resources – grants/funding. | A steering group involving the Teaching Council, the Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI), school management bodies, and the Department of Education and Skills. 
Linking teacher CPD with school self-evaluation process. 
Cosán: Framework for Teacher’s Learning |

### CLUSTER 3 – PATHWAYS TO INCLUSION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTION POINT</th>
<th>VISION – our highest potential</th>
<th>VEHICLE</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>3.1 Pilot a revival of vocational education at second level to value a range of pathways and involve industry</strong></td>
<td>Range of educational pathways that are flexible and valuable in terms of what they offer students: employment, independence, fulfilment.</td>
<td>A working group comprising industry funders, education and training boards, teachers, educators and pilot schools.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **3.2 Mobilise lateral channels to organise a central message (i.e. developing campaigns)** 
The issues include increase of financial investment in early education and financial support for accessing further/higher education for single parents | Inclusion of single mothers in education and/or in employment. | Sub-committees of the Social Innovation Fund Ireland Education Fund – existing networks (nine projects and beyond). 
Ambassadors and champions. |
| **3.3 Bring alternatives into the mainstream via a universal design for learning** | Universal design for learning. | Participate in existing consultations – e.g. NCCA, senior cycle. 
Participate in initiatives involving international human rights law (UNCRPD, ICESCR, etc), working with the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission and the Ombudsman for Children. |
| **3.4 Community of practice outcome: developing a collaborative and advocacy voice of the nine Social Innovation Fund Ireland Education Fund projects** | Leverage change/leading change – voice of the socially excluded. 
Recognition of the right to education. 
Funding to follow the learner. 
Recognition by the formal education sector of community-sector contributions to education. | Advocacy network. 
Peer support. 
Shared learning/data. |
### EVENT PROGRAMME

#### WEDNESDAY 8 MAY (AFTERNOON)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13.00</td>
<td>Lunch on arrival and registration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.00 – 15.00</td>
<td>Introductions, opening and overview of process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.00 – 15.30</td>
<td>Showcase presentations (2x ‘Pathways and Inclusion’ projects)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.30 – 15.45</td>
<td>Tea and refreshments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.45 – 16.15</td>
<td>Showcase presentations (2x ‘Pathways and Inclusion’ projects)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.15 – 16.45</td>
<td>Policy Perspective – Stories of Change Happening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.45 – 18.00</td>
<td>First Cluster Session (60 minutes): introductions and sharing perspectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.00 – 19.00</td>
<td>Break</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.00</td>
<td>Menu of informal activities (trade fair, creative challenges, bonfire, Burren buffet)</td>
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</tbody>
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#### THURSDAY 9 MAY (ALL DAY)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9.00 – 9.30</td>
<td>Welcome back and overview of day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.30 – 10.00</td>
<td>Observations from evaluators (UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, NUIG)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.00 – 10.45</td>
<td>Showcase presentations (3x ‘Getting to College’ Projects)</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.45 – 11.00</td>
<td>Coffee</td>
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<tr>
<td>11.00 – 11.30</td>
<td>Showcase presentations (2x ‘Alternative Education’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.30 – 12.30</td>
<td>Second Cluster Session: looking afresh – how might we see things differently?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.30 – 15.00</td>
<td>Walk in the Burren (considering how systems evolve) – packed lunch provided</td>
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<tr>
<td>15.00 – 15.30</td>
<td>Tea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.30 – 16.30</td>
<td>Stories of change: learner’s perspective</td>
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<tr>
<td>16.30 – 18.00</td>
<td>Third Cluster Session: identifying acupuncture points</td>
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<tr>
<td>18.00 – 19.00</td>
<td>Break</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.00</td>
<td>Menu of informal activities and dinner</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
**EVENT PROGRAMME (CONTINUED)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9.00 – 9.30</td>
<td>Welcome back and defining the challenges of the day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.30 – 10.30</td>
<td>Fourth Cluster Session: moving forwards – creating and sustaining momentum</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.45 – 11.00</td>
<td>Coffee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.00 – 12.00</td>
<td>Fifth Cluster Session: specific action planning and how best to share insights with others</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.00 – 13.00</td>
<td>Conclusions and whole group action planning</td>
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<tr>
<td>13.00 – 14.00</td>
<td>Closing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.00</td>
<td>Burren walk (optional)</td>
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</table>