

# St Mary's University College

# Research Newsletter

## COLLEGE SUCCESS WITH EU RESEARCH FUNDING

The College was successful in gaining research funding, along with five other EU partners, for a project titled, *Stimulating science and technology competences through innovative means for teaching and learning* (STIMULA). The funding was a result of a joint proposal made to the Education, Audiovisual & Culture Executive Agency's (EACEA) Lifelong Learning Programme at the beginning of 2011. The project is being managed by Kieran McGeown in collaboration with Martin Hagan and the Research Office, and involves other organisations from the world of science communication, higher education, research and development, research networks, and post-primary education.

The countries involved are Germany, Romania, Spain, and the United Kingdom. The project aims to determine the perceptions of young European pupils, from schools involved in the project, towards learning about science and technology at school in terms of motivation, interest, enjoyment, activities, career prospects, etc. Following on from this, the project will devise a series of science and technology competency guidelines on pedagogy and learning, and bidirectional collaboration between schools and research & development centres. The guidelines will then be piloted within the project's schools to determine their appropriateness as examples of best practice.

## THE 'LEONARDO EFFECT' GOES INTO PRINT

The primary school phase of the *Leonardo Effect* project is now the subject of a book currently being edited by two members of academic staff, Dr Ivor Hickey and Deirdre Robson, due to be published by Routledge early in 2012. The book will be useful in supporting teachers who wish to embrace interdisciplinary teaching in their practice and informing academics and researchers within initial teacher education of the outcomes of the project. To do this, the book will be divided into two sections.

The first will deal with the background to the development of the project and will include an analysis of current controversies in art and science education, as well as a description of the results obtained in the *Leonardo Effect* study. The second section will be composed of a series of vignettes written by teachers who were involved with the project. Each will explain how specific aspects of the research worked with the pupils in their class, allowing readers to identify with specific classroom outcomes. There will be contributions from the two editors in the form of chapters, as well as other members of academic staff within the College and project participants who were involved in the study.



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### SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST

- Research Excellence Framework guidelines available at: [http://www.hefce.ac.uk/research/ref/pubs/2011/02\\_11/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/research/ref/pubs/2011/02_11/)
- GTCNI launch of research report *Teachers' Voice 2010* at: <http://www.gtcni.org.uk/>
- New BERA ethical guidelines for educational research (2011) at: <http://www.bera.ac.uk/files/2011/08/BERA-Ethical-Guidelines-2011.pdf>



## INVITED TALK BY ACADEMIC AT RESEARCH WORKSHOP

Dr Birgit Schippers was invited to give a talk in June 2011 at a conference workshop titled, *The Category of Violence* held at the Centre for Citizenship, Civil Society and Rule of Law (CISRUL) in the University of Aberdeen. The conference workshop included speakers and attendees from the disciplines of anthropology, international politics, political philosophy/theory, the philosophy of language, citizenship, conflict, and gender studies. The title of the talk was *The category of violence in Judith Butler's political thought* and it examined Butler's account of the role of violence in the formation of the subject and of communities and political coalitions. Birgit drew on her

interests in the relationship between affect on politics on the one hand, and between violence and sovereignty on the other. By developing this point, Birgit sought to explore Butler's treatment of an ethics of non-violence and of the prospects of articulating non-violent political relationships. Currently, Birgit is revising the invited talk to create a paper for a possible submission to the academic journal *Redescriptions: yearbook of political thought, conceptual history and feminist theory*.

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### TESS PRESENTATION

As part of the Teacher Education Seminar Series 2010/2011, the College welcomed Dr Brian Cummins from Stranmillis University College Belfast and Dr John Kelly from Fingerprint Learning who visited in June 2011.

The title of their research seminar was *‘EntreBRAINeur’: investigating entrepreneurial learning preferences*, and it was attended by a large number of academic staff. The focus was on the findings of their research conducted with a large sample of Northern Ireland entrepreneurs which investigated patterns of learning preferences.

Their research presentation stimulated much debate on the subject of entrepreneurial learning preferences in relation to curriculum design, assessment instruments, and initial teacher education. This seminar also gave rise to possible collaboration with St Mary's on future research.

## RESEARCH PAPER PRESENTATION BY ACADEMICS

A research paper by Eibhlín Mhic Aoidh, Jill Garland, Dr Gabrielle Nig Uidhir and Dr John Sweeney was presented at an international conference titled *Re-Imagining Initial Teacher Education: Perspectives On Transformation* held at St Patrick's College Drumcondra in June/July 2011.

The conference themes included: re-conceptualising initial teacher education; explorations of theoretical and philosophical perspectives and international trends and practice; and communities of practice within initial teacher education, with keynote speakers including Marilyn Cochran-Smith, Boston College and John Furlong, Green Templeton College Oxford.

The title of the research paper was *Self-evaluating a PGCE Irish-medium model of initial teacher education* which outlined how the PGCE programme in St Mary's was initially developed and went further to describe the immersion approach at postgraduate level in the College.

As part of this, aspects of both the process and outcomes of a self-evaluation were highlighted exploring the promotion of the linguistic competences of students of initial teacher education, as well as the development of partnerships with schools and outside agencies. The paper was presented under the parallel session Language & Citizenship and has also been submitted as a potential chapter in a book stemming from the conference.



Above: Delegates who attended the Higher Education Academy's seminar series in the College which highlighted three research projects on student engagement.

Below: Eddie Gulc from the Higher Education Academy introducing the research seminar.

## HEA SEMINAR SERIES HELD IN COLLEGE

A HEA-funded seminar series, organised by Gerry Trainor and the Research Office, highlighted research conducted by three members of academic staff on student engagement which took place in the College in May 2011. Twenty people attended the seminar from the College, the University of Ulster, the Higher Education Academy, Queen's University Belfast, and Belfast Metropolitan College. The three research case studies, presented by Mary Greenwood, Joan Campbell and Micheál Martin, were designed to give students a voice, to listen to their feedback, and to develop as a result. Following on from the presentations, there was an opportunity for participants to discuss their own experiences in the area of listening to students and to share ideas and good practice. The presenters found their engagement with students, as part of their research, to be extremely worthwhile and their investment in terms of time and resources was rewarded by the new insights they gained into each professional situation which has led to improvements in practice and policy development.



## PUBLICATION IN INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM PROCEEDINGS



The *Proceedings of the International Geographical Union—Commission on Geographical Education (IGU—CGE) Symposium* held at Fatih University in Istanbul, were published in June 2011. The title of the Symposium was *Building Bridges Between Cultures Through Geographical Education* and it was attended last year by Dr Margaret Keane who was successful in having her research paper included in the Proceedings.

The Symposium included about 100 geographers from 23 countries who congregated to discuss the latest developments in geographical education. Margaret's research paper was titled ***Learning to share space in divided societies: thirdspace perspectives.***

It reported on a project which sought to provide opportunities for university students from deeply divided and segregated worlds to think critically and creatively about space and spatiality as well as their deeply implicated feelings of national identity.

## M-LEVEL STUDENT RESEARCH

M-level students taking the module *Ag tacú le Litearthacht do Pháistí sa rang lán-Ghaeilge* conducted action research in their classrooms in a range of Irish-medium schools during May and June 2011 for presentation to their lecturers and peers in the new academic year. Their lecturers, Dr Gabrielle Nig Uidhir, Eibhlín Mhic Aoidh and Dr Seán Mac Corraidh, considered their research to be of high quality, informative and relevant to fellow students. Examples of their research included: spelling strategies in the primary school; improving writing in a second language at primary school; and special educational needs in the post-primary school. These research developments within an Irish-medium context are very significant and make a positive contribution to the Irish-medium sector.

## NEW CHAPTER OF BOOK PUBLISHED

Two academics within the College, Dr Birgit Schippers and Jonathan Worley, have contributed a chapter titled *Political theory, academic writing, and widening participation* to the book *Writing In The Disciplines* edited by Mary Deane & Peter O'Neill and published in August 2011 by Palgrave Macmillan. The aim of the chapter is to reflect upon a collaborative model of teaching political theory and the teaching of academic writing in political theory that the two authors engage in, and to share their experiences and ideas with other academic teachers. In their chapter, Birgit and Jonathan consider student engagement with politics and academic reading and writing against the backdrop of an alleged disenchantment with politics on the one hand, and the impact of the widening participation agenda on the other. The authors demonstrate that student writing in political studies cannot be separated from broader student engagement with the world of politics. Moreover, they consider how pre-university learning experiences often inhibit creative and critical practices associated with active learning. Central to the chapter is a consideration of potential pedagogical interventions that are intended to develop students' critical facilities. These, as Birgit and Jonathan aver, are crucial to the academic learning experience and to the civic identity of the students.

## STAFF PROFILE

Dr Gerard McCann, who has lectured students in the BA Liberal Arts degree at



the College since 2001, has established himself as a substantial contributor to raising the research profile of St Mary's within the area of Politics and International Studies. Gerard's research specialisms focus on the European Union's economic development, as well as the process of globalisation. Gerard has been successfully involved in gaining funding associated with his research specialisms, most

notably from the Department for International Development, the British Council, and the European Commission. He has also produced research output in the form of research reports, academic journal articles, book chapters, as well as single-authored and co-edited books. Recent significant research publications include: *From the local to the global: key issues in development studies*, which has been translated into Polish, Greek and Slovakian to reach a more global audience; *Issues in economic development in Sub-Saharan Africa*, which has involved collaboration with the University of Zambia; and *Ireland's economic history*, due for publication in September 2011.

As a result of Gerard's research publications, he has visited many countries across Europe where he has presented papers at research conferences, and has delivered lectures to academics and students. Recently, he was invited to present the prestigious 2010 Annual Lecture on Foreign Affairs at the Warsaw School of Economics. Gerard is also a member of the editorial group for the journal *Policy and Practice: a development education review*, which is the only journal on global education published in Ireland. Gerard is currently completing a project with partners from various universities across the UK, which aims to establish an open educational resource online, relating to the teaching of education for sustainable development and global citizenship, and is preparing a manuscript on the European Union's development policy.

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