



INSIGHTS INTO

RESEARCH



**St Mary's
University College**

A College of Queen's University Belfast

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Volume 2
(March 2025 - August 2025)



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Collaborative Research on Leadership Learning Shared with Peers

An international conference, which brought together teachers, researchers and academics to share their expertise and experience on innovative teaching and learning methodologies, took place during June 2025 in Florence, Italy. It was titled The Future of Education and was attended by Professor Martin Hagan who co-presented a collaborative research project that involved Stranmillis University College and James Madison University. The title of Martin's presentation was "Fostering Equity And Peace Through Intensive Leadership Learning" and it focused on a study that aimed to examine the influence of participation in an intensive Just Peace Leadership Programme for educational leadership students.

The programme was designed to identify core leadership values and enhance cultural competency to develop social justice literacy. The overarching goal was to empower participants to drive transformative educational changes in the pursuit of social justice. Twenty-one participants were drawn from two

institutions in Northern Ireland and a state university in the United States of America. An interpretative research design was employed, with data collected from a pre-experience questionnaire, learning journals, focus group reflections, action plans for practice development and a focus group conducted three months post-programme. Data analysis was hermeneutical, dialectical and interpretative. Findings indicated that the intensive programme design enhanced exposure to diversity, reflection and motivation for action-oriented planning for change. Participants reported shifts in their professional identities and recognised their capacity to affect educational transformation. The programme supported aspiring school leaders to develop competence and confidence as authentic moral agents for social justice and systemic change. The research study underscored the importance of leadership development initiatives that are explicitly designed to prepare educators for the challenges of fostering equity, inclusivity and peace within diverse educational settings.



Presentation Delivered at Annual Meeting to Appreciate and Promote Irish Culture

The twenty-third international conference of the Spanish Association for Irish Studies (aka AEDEI) took place during May 2025 and was attended by Dr Angela Vaupel, who presented her paper that was titled “The Uses And Abuses Of Irishness: Der Irlandkrimi – A German Reception Of Irish Culture As A Substitute For National Heritage?”. It was held at the University of Huelva, Spain and was organised by its Department of English and the WAEIRE research cluster.

In Angela’s paper, she aimed to examine the uses and abuses of Irishness in German media, focusing on the contemporary crime TV series Der Irlandkrimi (the Irish crime thriller). Set in the picturesque landscapes of Ireland, the series reflected German longing to escape its troubled history and challenging present by immersing itself in a romanticised, culturally ‘pure’ setting. The crime genre played a significant role by combining the allure of crime with the appeal of Ireland’s enigmatic, timeless atmosphere. While Der Irlandkrimi attempted to avoid oversimplifications and national stereotypes, such as the clichéd portrayal



of Ireland as a land of rugged charm and mystical folklore, it risked perpetuating a sanitized and idealized version of Irishness.

The show framed Ireland as a place of moral certainty, untouched by the complexities of historical or political conflict. Angela’s presentation critiqued whether the series truly avoided these oversimplifications or subtly reinforced them through its selective ‘use’ of Irish culture. By exploring the intersection of gender, media consumption and national identity, her study assessed whether Der Irlandkrimi simply offered an escape into a fictionalised version of Ireland and potentially distorted Irish cultural realities to suit its own narrative needs.





Three Research-Related Articles Featured in Online Academic Journal

The academic journal, *Léann Teanga: An Reiviú*, is published by the University of Galway and it provides a platform for language discourse in Ireland and abroad. It is deemed to be a valuable resource for Irish language academics and those interested in language matters. In the most recent issue, which came out during April 2025, there were three research-related articles written by members of academic staff related to the work of Máire (Séamus Ó Grianna).

The first article, by Padaí de Bléine and titled “Iniúchadh ar ómós na háite dúchais mar a léirítear é trí theaghlach, theanga, thraidisiún, thírdhreach agus thírghrá san úrscéal *Mo Dhá Róisín* (1921) le Máire”, explored the importance of place in the novel *Mo Dhá Róisín* by Séamus Ó Grianna. It focused on family, language, tradition, landscape and patriotism and demonstrated how these areas influenced the writings of Ó Grianna.

The second article, by Dr Fearghal Mac Bhloscaidh and titled “Máire, *Feara Fáil* agus an Díchoilíniú”, dealt with a giant of the revival, Máire or Séamus Ó Grianna. Although he lost his courage in the revival at the end of his life, Máire adhered to his republicanism from birth to death. Fearghal’s article built on Ó Dhornáin’s argument that Fanon and Said’s theory can be used to situate Máire’s work in the context of decolonisation.

The third article, by Dr Seán Mac Corraidh and titled “Teanga mheafarach Mháire ar nós ‘...mar a bheadh ‘duine/rud/ainmhí’, ‘mar a bheadh ‘duine/rud/ainmhí’ ann’, ‘mar a bheadh ‘duine/rud/ainmhí’ (ann) a bheadh’...agus na téamaí ina léirítear an ghné thábhachtach seo dá stíl liteartha”, was about the use of Irish in short stories and novels by Máire (Séamus Ó Grianna). The focus related to Seán’s postgraduate research project, as well as his reading, translation and reflection, which facilitated the articulation of his observations and ideas.



Research Showcased at International Education Conference

The annual international conference on Education and New Developments, which took place in Budapest, Hungary during June 2025, featured a presentation by Karen McGivern on the topic of empowering innovation. It took the form of a research poster and was titled “Empowering Innovation: The Role Of Generative AI In Transforming Projects For University Students”. Karen’s research explored the transformative role of Generative AI (GAI) in university students’ academic projects, by focusing on its potential to enhance creativity, idea generation and research processes.

The research investigated how GAI tools, like ChatGPT and AI-driven design platforms, can facilitate creative problem-solving and streamline research practices. It addressed key questions about GAI’s influence on student creativity, its perceived benefits and challenges, as well as effective integration strategies for educators. Drawing on recent literature, the study revealed that GAI enhanced students’ creativity, streamlined research processes and offered personalised learning experiences. However, it also raised ethical concerns and challenges related to academic integrity. Karen’s research emphasised the urgent need for comprehensive lecturer training on GAI to enable effective integration into classroom instruction and assessment practices. She suggested that the approach is crucial for developing students’ AI literacy and mitigating potential over-reliance on technology. The study recommended a balanced curriculum that leverages AI’s creative potential, while addressing its limitations, ultimately encouraging responsible and innovative use of these emerging technologies in higher education.

‘However, it also raised ethical concerns and challenges related to academic integrity.’

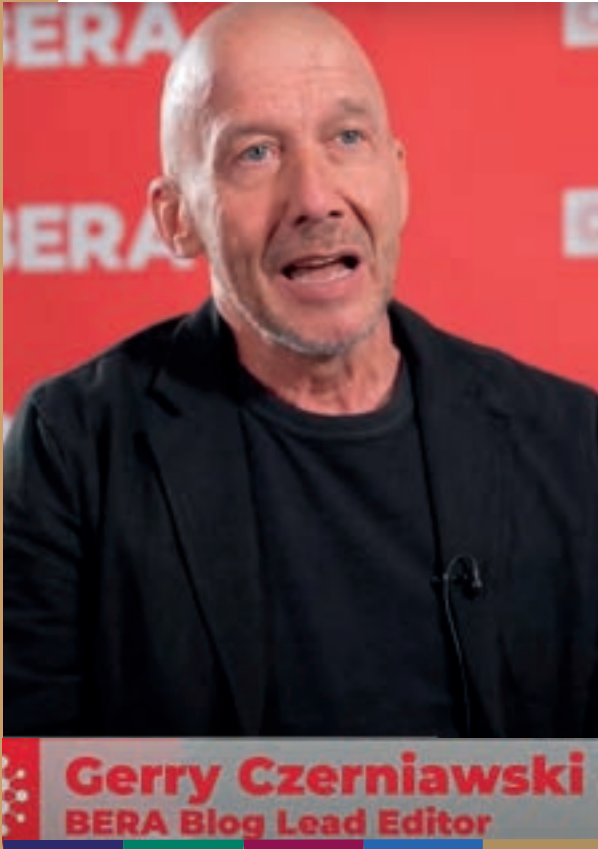
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28-30 June
Budapest,
Hungary

2025

International Conference
on Education and New Developments





Academic Staff Come Together to Discuss Their Research

Members of academic staff gathered for the annual Summer Research Symposium, which took place during June 2025, at which some presented their research projects, while others listened and provided constructive feedback. The symposium was organised by the Research Office and it involved six presentations from both academic staff and a representative from the British Educational Research Association. It was well attended and provided a great opportunity for the sharing of research ideas, experiences and practices, with comments and questions coming from the audience.

It began with a welcome and introduction by the Research Office, during which examples of success stories regarding academic staff's recent research publications, conference presentations and collaborative projects were provided. This was followed by a presentation from Professor Gerry Czerniawski, titled "Writing For The BERA Blog", which informed the academic staff about the purpose of the initiative, as well as the processes involved in making a submission and reviewing a paper.

The first presentation given by a member of our academic staff was titled "Telling Our Stories: Exploring Personal History And Timelines In Initial Teacher Education" and it was delivered by Teresa Cash. She spoke about her research involving her World-Around-Us students' experiences of engaging with the concept of time and its significance in primary school pupils' learning. The second presentation was delivered by Dr Thomas Rogan and it was titled "The Imposter In The Classroom: Making The Move From Classroom To Lecture Theatre." The research was autoethnographic and it aimed to document feelings of the presenter as an imposter and to consider how it influenced his professional work. He presented an enhanced understanding of imposter syndrome and explained how it manifested and contributed to his professional identity.

'... research involving her World-Around-Us students' experiences of engaging with the concept of time and its significance in primary school pupils' learning.'

After the morning break, the next presentation was titled "Embedding Oral Reading Fluency: One Primary School's Journey So Far" and it was delivered by Dr Geraldine Magennis-Clarke. The main aims outlined during her presentation focused on exploring the journey of staff as they embedded oral reading fluency instruction into their Key Stage 2 curriculum provision, as well as examining staff's and pupils' views on the potential of it assisting pupils in becoming more accomplished and enthusiastic readers. Her presentation also touched upon identifying possible lessons for the improvement of literacy provision within the school.

The presentation that followed was given by Dr Frances Burgess and it was titled "First Year Students' Perceptions Of Creativity: Interim Findings From The PerC Project." The presenter referred to the project's main aim, which was to emphasise how teacher educators, students and policy writers can better respond to the calls for more creative teaching and learning in universities and schools, when multiple understandings and perspectives are brought into contact with each other.

The final presentation of the symposium was jointly delivered by Dr Eddie McGee and Sharon Haughey, whose research was titled "'Sentio Ergo Sum' – Emotional Competences And The Learning Environment." Their presentation explored how developing emotional competences in initial teacher education can enhance teacher resilience and improve classroom dynamics. Using the Profile of Emotional Competence tool, they conducted a study with students to assess both intra- and inter-personal emotional skills. Their findings highlighted the benefits of embedding emotional competence development within the BEd programme and its impact on both teacher wellbeing and pupil engagement.

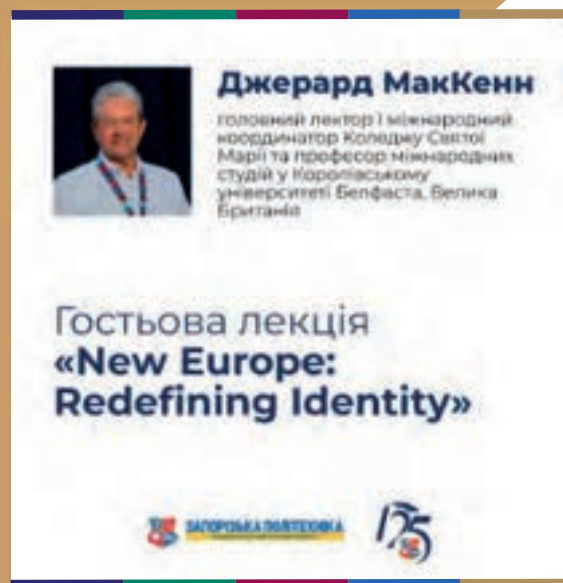


'... to emphasise how teacher educators, students and policy writers can better respond to the calls for more creative teaching and learning in universities and schools...'

Research on Global Processes and International Relations Presented to Delegates

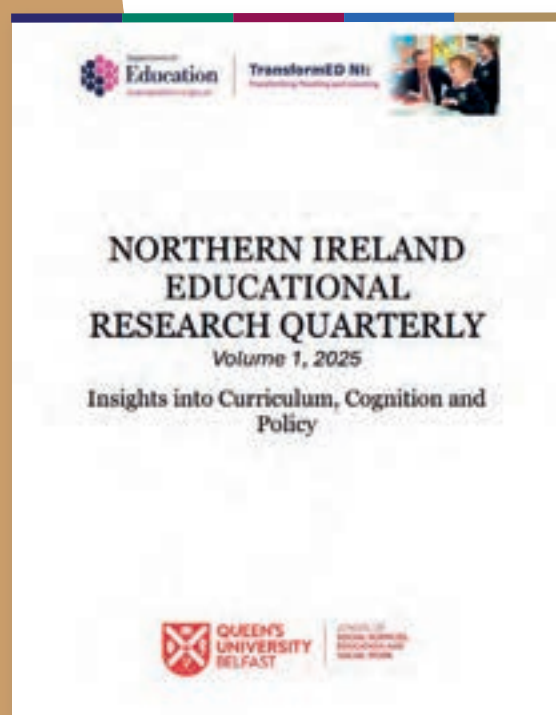
A panel of international academics, organised by the Zaporizhzhia Polytechnic National University, Ukraine, delivered a selection of online research lectures during March 2025. One of the panelists was Professor Gerard McCann, who presented his research titled “New Europe: Redefining Identity.” During his presentation, delegates learned about the current challenges and prospects of European integration, as well as the historical lessons of international cooperation and their impact on the future of Europe.

Gerard’s research looked at reasons for the success of the European recovery programme in the post-Second World War period, and it highlighted the policy interventions and economic redevelopment that led to the establishment of the Common Market. Gerard’s research formed part of the Education Development in Ukraine in War and Peace (EDUWAP) project.



Research on the Reading Brain

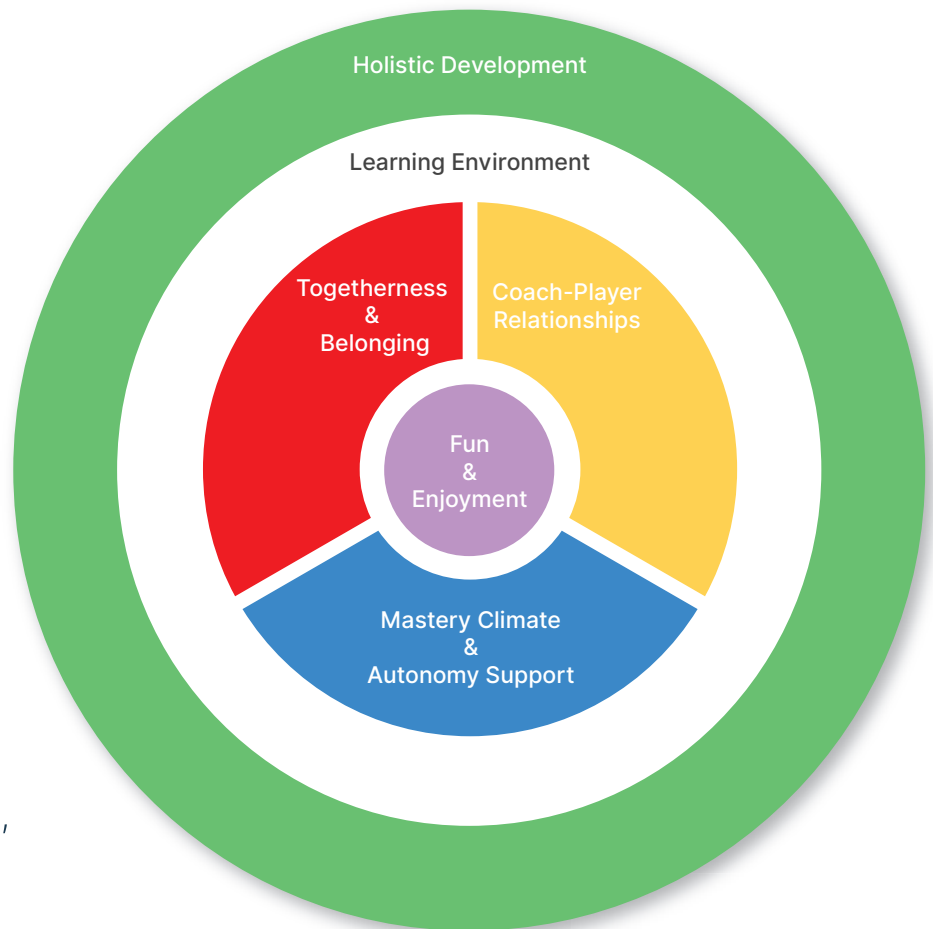
A recent publication from the Department of Education that has connections to the current review of the Northern Ireland Curriculum, in terms of educational research, was published during August 2025 and it featured a research-based article by Dr Geraldine Magennis-Clarke. The title of Geraldine’s research paper was “A Bird’s Eye View Of The Reading Brain” and it referred to the importance of educators knowing about how the brain works, exploring its architecture, understanding explicit and impactful instruction, utilising Scarborough’s Reading Rope, and engaging in professional conversations about teaching and learning.



Article Explains Research on Psychological Principles for Coaches of Young Gaelic Players

A research-informed article by Dr Ciarán Kearney and his colleagues from the University of Lincoln and Dublin City University was published on the RTÉ Brainstorm website during June 2025. It was titled “How Coaches Can Create Great Environments For Young Gaelic Games’ Players” and it added to the RTÉ Brainstorm initiative, in which the academic and research community contribute to public debate, reflect on what is happening in the world and communicate fresh thinking on a broad range of issues.

In the article, Ciarán and his colleagues outlined ways in which coaches can use psychological principles to enhance the playing experience and development of young players. They referred to a series of principles and practical strategies that were recently proposed to help coaches create a playing environment that enhances the long-term participation, personal development and wellbeing of players. Their research drew upon the importance of coaches and clubs taking a holistic approach to developing their players and how Gaelic games can offer a place where young people learn essential life skills such as communication, respect, inclusiveness, community and teamwork.



The article referred to the development of relationships between coaches and players and how coaches can promote more self-determined motivation and mastery among players. Strategies that emphasise the importance and feelings of group membership to help create a sense of shared identity were also mentioned, as well as the importance of creating team environments, where enjoyment and fun are at the core, which are appealing and offer developmental benefits for young athletes.

‘... research drew upon the importance of coaches and clubs taking a holistic approach to developing their players...’

Group of Research Presentations Delivered at European Event on Teacher Education

The Association for Teacher Education in Europe (ATEE) held its annual conference during August 2025 and it featured three research presentations that involved academic staff from the College. The conference took place at Marino Institute of Education, Dublin under the theme *The Making of Authentic Teachers in Ages of Artificiality?* and it explored how teacher education can foster authenticity amidst performativity pressures, technological advancements and evolving identities. It provided a unique opportunity for delegates to engage in meaningful dialogue about the challenges and opportunities of teacher education in a rapidly changing world. Academics, educators and policymakers came together to discuss critical topics such as authenticity in teaching, the influence of AI and social media, as well as the evolving landscape of education policies and practices.

The first presenters included Dr Eddie McGee and Sharon Haughey, who delivered a paper titled *“Sentio Ergo Sum’ – Emotional Competences And The Learning Environment”*. During their presentation, they referred to educators seeking to navigate the challenges and opportunities presented by the emergence of AI technologies and online social platforms in order to explore and embed more effective pedagogical strategies to enhance learning and teaching within an increasingly digital learning environment. They also spoke about the evidence relating to the truly authentic and defining characteristics of the teacher being that of the human capacity to empathise and relate to students. Thus, creating a learning environment focused on the holistic formation of young people and offering high quality pastoral care which is trauma-informed.

Building upon the work of Peter Salovey in 1991 and Daniel Goleman in 1995, their quantitative research project employed the Profile of Emotional Competence (PEC) assessment tool, developed by Brasseur and Mikolajczak in 2013, to examine the intra-personal and inter-personal emotional competences of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) students in Northern Ireland. The PEC assessment tool examined five core competences (identification, understanding, expression, regulation and use of emotions)



distinctly for one's own emotions and the emotions of others. The research undertaken provided a nuanced insight into both the emotional competences of student teachers and also informed a more tailored approach to developing these competences among their pupils in the classroom. Key findings included: the profile of emotional competences of ITE students demonstrated progression across the programme of formation as teachers; the profile of emotional competences of ITE students informed the personal formation of teachers to assist them in becoming more effective practitioners within the classroom; and a study of emotional competences informed a more proactive and tailored curricular programme to build resiliency among pupils within the classroom context.

The second presenter was Professor Martin Hagan, who spoke about his collaborative research project, involving Dr Claire Connolly, which was titled *“Advancing From Andragogy To Heutagogy: Investigating Student Teachers’ Perceptions Of Professional Learning In Higher Education”*. The research study was built upon Knowles’ principles of adult learning from 1984 and Hase and Kenyon’s concept of heutagogy from 2000, which promoted a move from traditional didactic methods and emphasised the importance of learners taking full ownership of their educational journey, by cultivating critical thinking, creativity and adaptability to navigate the complexities of modern professional ecosystems. The research adopted an interpretative design and analysed data collected from the complete cohort of students enrolled in

a four-year initial teacher education programme. Data collection included a comprehensive questionnaire that captured both quantitative and qualitative insights on learning preferences, self-directed learning attitudes and perceived challenges in adopting heutagogical practices. This was supplemented by focus groups representing each cohort, which enabled a dialogic exploration of the findings and provided a deeper understanding of participants' experiences and perceptions of heutagogy in practice.

Findings indicated that whilst student teachers value interactive, practice-oriented learning experiences tailored to real-world classroom challenges, the transition toward heutagogical orientations revealed significant barriers, which included developing self-directed learning skills, critical reflection and adaptability. During instances where these barriers were overcome, heutagogy presented a transformative potential and fostered co-creation of knowledge and greater student engagement. It was recognised that the approach clearly required substantial changes to curriculum design, assessment strategies and staff development to create a cultural shift towards the creation of a more adaptive, student-driven learning environment. Nonetheless, the study underscored the potential of heutagogy in equipping future educators with the autonomy, critical thinking and adaptability needed for thriving in dynamic and complex educational landscapes.

The final presenter was Dr Gabrielle Nig Uidhir, who co-presented her collaborative research project, which involved University College Cork. Her presentation was titled "Recognising Authenticity: Evolving Policies For Immersion Teacher Competencies In Irish-Medium Education" and it addressed the urgent need

for evolving teacher education policies that acknowledge and embed immersion-specific competencies essential for Irish-Medium Education (IME) teachers.

Drawing upon sociocultural theory and Shulman's Domains of Teacher Knowledge, Gabrielle's study identified and exemplified the distinctive professional competencies vital for teachers within immersion education settings across both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Data, which were gathered through diverse methodologies including semi-structured interviews, focus groups, student symposia and extensive questionnaires, informed the development of an innovative rubric designed to stimulate reflection, enhance professional growth and ultimately guide policy change. Her paper critically synthesised existing literature and empirical findings to argue for significant policy reform that formally recognises the unique competencies required of IME teachers. It advocated for a holistic, collaborative and sustainable approach to teacher education, proposing targeted policy initiatives and robust partnerships that can foster authenticity in teaching. In doing so, it aimed to ensure more inclusive, culturally responsive and effective educational environments, better suited to meet the evolving needs of students in an age of artificiality.



Presentation at American Literature Symposium

An online presentation was delivered by Dr Matthew Martin during April 2025 at a symposium called The After Beckett: Theater and Performance for the 21st Century, which was an American literature conference in honour of Professor Enoch Brater's teaching at the University of Michigan. The conference was thus named to reference Brater's famous book, *After Beckett*, and Matthew's paper was titled "After Brater", in which he discussed the power and impact Enoch Brater had on him, as his dissertation supervisor, and on the ways in which he opened Matthew's eyes to the world of absurdist drama. Matthew referred to how Professor Brater prepared him for navigating the world of academia.



Research Insight Shared with Language Experts

The online journal, *Languages, Society & Policy*, offers high quality peer-reviewed language research that addresses issues concerning languages, cultures and societies in accessible and non-technical language. This open-access journal publishes policy papers, opinion articles and dialogues and welcomes contributions from disciplines that relate to language, such as linguistics and modern languages, as well as relevant fields of cognitive science, cultural studies, education, health sciences, neuroscience and psychology. A contributor of an article that was published during May 2025 was Dr Thomas Rogan, who wrote a piece titled "Language Teachers Of Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) In Mainstream Primary Schools – What Can They Learn From Irish-Medium (IM) Practitioners?" In his article, Thomas suggested three ways in which teachers of MFL in mainstream primary classrooms might enhance their practice by taking cognisance of the practice of IM practitioners. These related to creating immersive language learning experiences; focusing on language input which encourages language output; and valuing second language learning.



Journal Article Relating to Teachers' Views on Anxiety Impacting Autistic Pupils

One of the official journals from the National Association for Special Educational Needs, known as the Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs, featured an article during April 2025 by Dr Craig Goodall and his colleagues from Dublin City University. The journal provides essential reading for those working in the special educational needs and inclusive education field and it publishes original high quality empirical research, as well as theoretical papers on meeting special educational needs and inclusive education.

Craig's research article was titled "Anxiety Floods The Entire System": A Qualitative Study Exploring Teacher Perspectives Regarding How Anxiety Impacts Autistic Pupils With Co-Occurring Intellectual Disabilities" and was a qualitative study based in special school settings. The authors referred to how research in this area was limited, with existing studies often overlooking the distinct ways anxiety manifests and interacts with intellectual disabilities in this population. Semi-structured interviews with eight teachers explored their views on anxiety presentation, triggers and strategies for support. Reflexive thematic analysis provided nuanced insights into the findings. Teachers highlighted that anxiety often presents through behaviours misinterpreted as core features of autism, complicating identification and response to emotional needs. Environmental factors, including sensory stimuli, routine disruptions and limited spaces for sensory breaks, emerged as significant triggers. Unpredictable staffing and incompatible pupil groupings further exacerbated anxiety, contributing to social withdrawal and self-regulation challenges. To address these issues, teachers described using proactive strategies, such as transition planning, building trust or low-arousal environments. They emphasised the need for a whole-school, collaborative approach, alongside multidisciplinary support.



However, teachers often felt overwhelmed due to limited access to external specialists or support. Participants advocated for neurodiversity-affirming practices focusing on environmental triggers and regulation. The study underscored the importance of increased teacher support, comprehensive planning and integrating family and community resources to develop consistent anxiety management strategies.

'Teachers highlighted that anxiety often presents through behaviours misinterpreted as core features of autism, complicating identification and response to emotional needs.'

SCoTENS-Funded Project Presented at Irish Conference

The annual conference of the Educational Studies Association of Ireland took place in Athlone during April 2025 under the theme Building Bridges and Making Connections: Education for Hope and Transformation. As part of the conference, delegates explored the transformative potential of educational research, policy and practice as they engaged in dialogue, where critical reflection and innovative collaborations across the educational spectrum were generated. One of the presentations was based on a SCoTENS-funded research project titled “EKARA Project: Enhancing Equity And Awareness In Initial Teacher Education Through Reasonable Accommodations/Adjustments For Students With Disabilities In Ireland”, which involved Dr Donna Hazzard, Joe Hughes and Dr Claire Connolly, in collaboration with their colleagues from University College Cork.

Their project incorporated the views of students, lecturing staff and placement staff in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland in order to measure current understanding of reasonable accommodations or reasonable adjustments for teaching placement for Initial Teacher Education (ITE) students who have a disability.

Their research captured existing knowledge of effective approaches and best practice in this critical aspect of the ITE student experience and it identified any gaps in knowledge or understanding. Findings facilitated the embedding of confident and effective approaches to supporting disabled students on teaching placement and improving their experiences in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Following an extensive review of relevant literature, the collection of data involved online surveys administered to three key groups with the aim of mapping current understanding of, as well as attitudes towards, the needs of disabled ITE students and the associated reasonable accommodations or adjustments on teaching placement. It also involved focus groups and workshops with relevant groups to further explore key findings from the initial online surveys, as well as semi-structured interviews with teachers and ITE graduates from underrepresented groups. The knowledge generated from their research was used to develop an open-access toolkit for supporting ITE students on teaching placement both in the North and South. An end-of-project online dissemination event also took place during June 2025.



Contributors to School Partnership Conference Talk about Literacy and Numeracy



A conference took place at Queen's University Belfast during August 2025, which included presentations from Dr Geraldine Magennis-Clarke and Julie Hamilton. It was referred to as the South Belfast Primary Schools Partnership Conference and the theme for the event focused on Inclusion as Collective Praxis: Reimagining School and Community Relationships. Delegates were offered a mix of tailored training, opportunities to share practice and a space to reflect on their teaching. Geraldine's presentation focused on inclusive literacy and was titled "A High Literacy Tide Lifts All Learners", during which she outlined the current broad changes in literacy theory and instruction in light of current classroom practice in Northern Ireland. Julie's presentation focused on inclusive numeracy and was titled "The Role Of UDL In Making Maths And Numeracy Inclusive In Primary School Settings", during which she spoke to principals, teachers and classroom assistants about incorporating the principles and practices of universal design for learning and mathematics into their schools.

