

VTOS

A snapshot since 1989



30 YEARS

A Chara,

The National Association of VTOS Co-ordinators (NAVC) e-book was created to celebrate 30 years of the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS). From modest beginnings in 1989, VTOS was established to give early school leavers the opportunity to return to education and improve their situation in life. Since that time VTOS has continued to evolve and respond to the needs of those in our communities who experience disadvantage through unemployment, and the need to upskill and reskill.

The pace of change in our society is ever increasing, our communities and students are challenged to keep up with changing workplaces, an increased need for a highly skilled work force and the ever-present progression of automation. In addition to these challenges, this year we have experienced the unprecedented disruption that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought to us all. As well as the threat of severe illness, society has experienced exceptional numbers of layoffs, furloughs, and requirements to work from home. 2020 has been a year where VTOS has shown its true character and responded swiftly to keep students engaged by adapting our teaching to online programme delivery, and for that teachers and co-ordinators should be very proud.

The Further Education and Training (FET) sector is also going through a period of transformation and reform. SOLAS has ambitious goals to continue to develop the FET sector to be a highly valued lifelong learning and further education service in our communities, which takes its place in the education landscape on an equal footing with primary, secondary and higher education. There is no doubt that enhancing the profile of FET, and improving services should be of benefit to students and communities alike. The VTOS services have played a proud role in the FET service suite down through the years, and I have no doubt that VTOS teachers and co-ordinators will continue to do so and offer their voice to inform and support this transformation.

What has always made VTOS stand out from the crowd, and why our students are not shy about recommending us is due not only to the holistic service that VTOS offers but also to the time and effort that VTOS teachers give to support and inspire their students. Our highly skilled and experienced team of teachers and support services are dedicated and committed to supporting their students achieve their potential through education and encouraging a long-lasting love of learning.

On behalf of the e-Book team I sincerely hope you enjoy this publication and get a glimpse of the diverse range of programmes that are offered. On behalf of all of the NAVC and VTOS co-ordinators, I wish to thank the e-Book team Raymund O'Connor, Leesha Foley and Patricia Kennedy who have given their time and energy to this superb publication. I also wish to express my gratitude to all of the VTOS co-ordinators who made contributions and offered their VTOS stories. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the support of the National VTOS co-ordinator Gerard Griffin and the Department of Education and Skills for their support and encouragement.

Beir bua agus beannacht

Una Burke

Chairperson, NAVC



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VTOS CELEBRATING 30 YEARS

The purpose of this article is to document the unique development of VTOS through the years, giving some pointers that were central to the creation of VTOS as we know it, but also of the changing labour market that impacted on VTOS through its evolution. It should be noted also, as VTOS developed over the last 30 years, so did the other agencies that operate closely with the programme, e.g. the support services, accreditation bodies, management bodies etc.

During the NAVC annual Co-ordinators' conference in 2015, Mary O'Rourke (former Minister for Education) had the pleasure of giving an input at the conference, which celebrated the existence of VTOS for 25 years, how time moves on quickly!

Mary at this conference went on to say that one of the highlights as Minister for Education was her work leading to the establishment of VTOS as part of a European initiative that focussed upon adults returning to education and training across Europe. In 1990, Ireland held the European Presidency for six months. During that time Mary O'Rourke was the driving force behind the creation of education programmes to tackle the high unemployment levels of marginalised adults across the European states. VTOS was piloted in Tallaght and Limerick as the Employment Opportunities Scheme (EOS). As a result of these successful pilots, funding from Europe was allocated to VTOS. Subsequently VTOS then established itself throughout the country in the intervening years.

In 1990 unemployment in Ireland was approaching 20%. The statistics showed clearly at that time those with the weakest educational levels were the least likely to access or retain employment. The two-year, full time VTOS programme became a vehicle for assisting long term unemployed adults to access the education that they needed to get work. In 1990, Ireland held the European Presidency and for six months, Mary O'Rourke was leader of the Education Ministers across the EU.

VTOS is now in its 30th year of existence, congratulations to the Department of Education and Skills and the then Minister for Education, Mary O'Rourke, for having the foresight in 1989 to establish VTOS with the financial support of the European Commission. Congratulations to the then Vocational Education Committees (VECs) which undertook the delivery of VTOS and to the many enlightened Adult Education Officers (AEOs) who placed VTOS at the core of the adult education services. VTOS was the first full-time programme of adult learning to be managed by the AEOs in the majority of VECs (ETBs).

From the outset the main objective of VTOS was to enable participants to raise their general education levels while at the same time gaining skills for entry to the labour market, either directly after VTOS or indirectly through additional education and training in the emerging further education programmes and or in higher education. In other words, VTOS sought to be education led, vocationally-oriented and progression focused. Many students used VTOS as a stepping stone leading onto further education and training courses and higher education.

The arrival of the National Council for Vocational Awards (NCVA) in the early 1990s and FETAC in 2001 (and now QQI) provided a range of awards for participants to achieve. VTOS milestones over the past 30 years have included the following:

- The expansion of the original 289 places to 5,000 per annum and the extension of the programme to every county in Ireland;
- The lowering of the eligibility age from 25 to 21 and the eligibility period from one year to six months;
- The broadening of eligibility criteria to provide access to VTOS for individuals in receipt of a wide range of social protection supports;
- The emergence of permanent full-time staffing, including a management structure;
- The availability of a professional guidance service through the Adult Education Guidance Initiative;
- The development of a country-wide community of practice among skilled VTOS professionals;
- The embedding of VTOS at the heart of adult learning within the expanding further education and training service;
- The development of FET that includes a suite of programmes targeting adults who want to return to education.

VTOS has been renowned for its flexibility and responsiveness to the changing needs of participants and the economy. Over the past thirty years, VTOS has been a barometer that signals the demand and supply sides, based upon trends and events in the ever-changing wider educational, social and economic landscape in Ireland.

Through all these developments VTOS staff have kept the VTOS learner at the heart of provision through offering a person-centred service that seeks to enable each and every participant to reach his or her goals, identify new ambitions and progress to new achievements.

The adult education sector has gone through a process of transformation with all the structural reforms that have taken place. SOLAS has been tasked with ensuring the provision of 21st century high quality Further Education and Training programmes that are responsive to the needs of learners and the requirements of a changed and changing economy. Presently there is a huge amount of opportunities for adults who feel they didn't make full use of their first chance in education. The aim of second-chance education and further education and training is to give learners a second-chance education in a non-threatening environment that is learner centred.

There has been great success in directing learners from the programme into direct employment but also progressing onto more advanced education and training programmes through various access programmes provided by the Third Level Colleges and elsewhere. There is a huge gratitude to the pioneers who had the foresight to set up the programme initially and to all those VTOS staff, co-ordinators and teachers who have worked on the programme over the past thirty years, past and present, not forgetting the then Vocational Education Committees (VECs) which provided the vehicle for the delivery of the VTOS programme, managed by the Adult Education Officers (AEOs) who did sterling work to ensure that the programme on offer was learner centred and ensured tangible outcomes for all learners.

In conclusion, Indecon has been tasked by SOLAS to carry out an evaluation of VTOS and Specific Skills Training. The overall purpose of the evaluation is to generate policy-relevant knowledge concerning the appropriateness, conduct and impacts of VTOS and Specific Skills Training provision; to learn about the appropriateness of current policy on VTOS and Specific Skills Training provision and the effectiveness of both. This report is imminent and the outcomes of this report will ensure that VTOS will be able to respond effectively to the changing needs of learners and the labour market for the future.

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30 YEARS





VTOS CSN COLLEGE

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Coláiste Stiofáin Naofa was established as a secondary school for boys in the Ballyphehane/Togher area, Cork in the early 1970s. In the 1990s there was less demand for second level education in the area. The school started to offer Post Leaving Certificate courses such as Horticulture and Leisure and Recreation. During this time other courses were introduced in music, art and computers. This era marked the beginning of the school as a centre for further education. The staff team comprises one principal, two deputy principals, fifty six teaching staff and twelve auxiliary staff.

The year 2000 marked the beginning of a purpose designed extension that gave the college a strong architectural identity. Much of CSN is purpose designed to suit the courses offered. Specific facilities have enhanced the delivery of quality courses for applicants including school leavers and adults. CSN now offers over 40 courses for students from all corners of the city and county. CSN College won Best Further Education Provider in the Irish Education Awards in 2019 with 60% (175) of students securing a place at Higher Education. Links with Higher Education include CIT through Cork Colleges Progression Scheme, UCC and other Third Level Institutions where graduates secure their chosen place in Higher Education. Industry links and work experience placements enable CSN graduates to secure employment. CSN College focuses on student experience, industry links and college progressions.

CSN College has adapted to teaching online using Moodle and other Technology Enhanced Learning tools for the virtual classroom. Many extra-curricular course activities take place on campus such as music rehearsals and recordings as well as CSN Digital Radio Station <http://juicefm.csn.ie/>

COURSES

35 Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses include Art, Furniture & Construction Technology, Software Development, Sports, Business, Cultural & Heritage Studies, Social Studies, Performing Arts and Science & Horticulture. Courses are one year, QQI level 5 and 6 Awards, BTEC HND (Digital Media) accreditation and other awarding bodies. Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) and Evening Courses ensure strong community links.

JAMES'S STORY

In 2016 I had just been declared bankrupt after a bad business decision. I had nothing left. My wife and children were looking at me to figure out what the next step was. Most of my knowledge was self-taught and because of this I found it hard to secure employment. This is when I looked at returning to education and getting certified in what I enjoy, which was IT. This was a big step financially as how else was I going to provide for my family. VTOS provided the support for me to start with the QQI Level 5 Software Development course. VTOS provided me with a safety net in terms of a weekly income while participating in the further education. I certainly would not be where I am today without VTOS support. At present I am in my final year studying for an Honours in IT Management in Munster Technological University.



VTOS KILMALLOWCK

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Kilmallock is a rural town, located 20 miles from Limerick city. The VTOS centre opened in 1994 and is located in a building that was known as the Technical School. The campus is shared with part-time programmes and St Joseph's Foundation, Charleville. As part of a major refurbishment in 2018, the campus was modernised, which included insulation of buildings, a new heating system and upgrade of classrooms and canteen.

In the early days, VTOS Kilmallock offered Leaving Certificate subjects, basic Computers, Hotel and Catering skills. Today, we offer QQI level 5 and level 6 courses in Business, Computing, Tourism and ICDL. Learners receive additional supports in Career Counselling, Interview and CV preparation. We are very fortunate in 2020 to have the Active Inclusion Support Service of Limerick and Clare ETB. They have supported learners through the laptop loan initiative to help them work remotely and they also provide mental health supports. The core of our philosophy is to develop the learners' well-being and to enable them to realise their full potential.

Learners participate in a wide range of extra-curricular activities, which contribute to an enjoyable and inclusive learning experience. These have included visits to local companies, ESB Ardnacrusha, Middleton Brewery, University of Limerick open days, Aontas National Learning Forum, International Women's Day Celebrations, Art Exhibitions, Annual Graduation Ceremonies as well as Art and Craft workshops. Past learners have gone on to further education in Limerick Institute of Technology, University of Limerick and Mary Immaculate College. Learners have also taken up work in the HSE, car dealerships, the Courts Service, Public Sector, local companies and many other areas which require administration, accounting or IT support.

COURSES

QQI Level 5, Office Administration and Digital Marketing Skills

QQI Level 5, eBusiness

QQI Level 5, Business with Tourism

ICDL, Advanced Word and Advanced Excel

TERESA'S STORY

Following a career in banking, I decided to retrain and took two years out to attend an Office Administration and an e-Business course in VTOS, at the Further Education and Training Centre in Kilmallock, Co. Limerick. I have had the best two years of my life. There was excellent teacher contact with a good structure in place. Personally, I believe the teachers here are top class. All of this made studying for my two qualifications so much easier. Not only have I left the courses with an enhanced skill set, but also with a new-found confidence and some lasting friendships. I got excellent advice and help from the career guidance and I feel I am ready for my next move, which is working as an Accounts Assistant with a local engineering company.

Thank you VTOS Kilmallock for giving me this opportunity to retrain and to the VTOS Co-Ordinator for recommending me for my new role.



VTOS WICKLOW TOWN

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VTOS in Wicklow Town was established in 1992 and quickly became woven into the fabric of the community. Based in a Further Education and Training Centre since 2002, VTOS provides a vibrant, inclusive and supportive space for learning. We have a passionate and committed team who are dedicated to providing high quality education courses and a positive learning experience for students.

COURSES

QQI Level 5, Art Craft and Design

QQI Level 5, Business Studies

QQI Level 5, Health Service Skills

QQI Level 5, General Studies (Preparation for College)

QQI Level 5, Early Childhood Care and Education

QQI Level 6, Business

VELMA'S STORY

In 1993, a long career in nursing came to an abrupt halt for me following an unfortunate back injury. As a single mother of two teenagers the prospect of finding fulfilling employment to replace nursing was a major challenge. I had long been involved in amateur dramatics and had often felt I would love to pursue a teaching career in the Arts. Having been a volunteer drama leader with Bray Youth Theatre since 1990, I began to pursue the idea of gaining an Arts degree. Then in the summer of 1994, quite by chance, I heard of an opportunity which would enable me to do just that. September 1994 is a date I will never forget. I signed up for an outreach Access course in Wicklow town, which was funded by the VTOS Scheme. My life immediately changed for the better.

After ACCESS, I completed an NCVA Level 2 (now QQI Level 5) Performing Arts course in Bray, then realized my third-level dream. In 2000, I achieved an honours degree in Drama and Theatre Studies from TCD. Being a beneficiary of VTOS, I felt I had a lot to offer in the Adult Education sector, and was lucky enough to secure a part-time position, teaching Drama in both Wicklow and Bray Further Education Centres. My scope of teaching practice broadened over the following 10 years and I secured a full-time permanent position in Wicklow which, alongside Drama, included teaching FETAC Level 5 Healthcare and Childcare modules.

Concurrent to my teaching work, I had returned to university to work on post-graduate research (Irish Women's Theatre History), and in 2013, I was awarded a PhD from TCD.

I feel incredibly fortunate to be in a position wherein my skills and qualifications, from nursing and the arts, have merged, enabling me to forge a very interesting and satisfying career in teaching within the Adult Education sector. The opportunity VTOS offered me back in 1994 continues to offer invaluable educational, vocational and life-changing opportunities to many people to this day. I am proud to be both a beneficiary, and now a provider, of the imagination and support that characterizes VTOS.

Each year we run additional learning opportunities for students such as Patient Moving and Handling, Manual Handling and the PHECC qualification. In addition to these we also run a number of additional extra-curricular activities around wellbeing for our students such as Stress Management workshops and Introduction to Yoga classes. Annually, our academic year culminates in a Centre Graduation Ceremony to celebrate our students' achievements.

Velma O'Donoghue
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VTOS LIMERICK CITY

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VTOS Limerick City was established under Limerick City VEC as one of the first pilot Schemes in 1986 and has since grown from strength to strength. Currently, there are over 20 full-time staff and 210 learners. Thousands of learners have benefited from VTOS Limerick City and many are now well established in professional careers. Over the years, our Scheme has become very multi-cultural and this has greatly enhanced our provision. We work closely with the many support services within LCETB including the Active Inclusion Service, TEL and the Enterprise Engagement Departments. Originally based in Sexton Street, we are now based in the modern, state-of-the-art Further Education Centre at Kilmallock Road Campus. VTOS Limerick City has organized many events over the years and these include our annual graduation ceremony, Intercultural Day, Open Days, Art & Design exhibitions, Erasmus+ activities as well as various concerts and cultural events.

COURSES

Leaving Certificate (10 subjects)
QQI Level 3, Key Skills
QQI Level 3, English for Employment
QQI Level 4, Retail Skills
QQI Level 4, Engineering Skills
QQI Level 5, Contact Centre Operations
QQI Level 5, Office Administration
QQI Level 5, Medical Terminology
QQI Level 5, Digital Marketing
QQI Level 5, Art, Craft and Design
QQI Level 5, Healthcare Support
QQI Level 5, Environmental Studies

DECLAN'S STORY

I joined VTOS in 2012 as a mature student because in school the experience was not positive as I was not able to keep up and was constantly criticized. I sat my Leaving Certificate and I also completed a Digital Marketing course in VTOS, which was vital for my career progression. VTOS helped me not just academically but to value others' opinions. I learned how to adapt to different or difficult situations and to work as part of a team. VTOS enabled me to progress to third level where I successfully obtained a Bachelor of Business (Hons) Degree in Law and Taxation from Limerick Institute of Technology.

VTOS gave me the foundation and confidence to become self-employed and not having to rely on social welfare. It has had a very positive influence on me and for this I am extremely grateful.



VTOS NEW ROSS

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Established in 1991, VTOS New Ross has offered a wide range of courses down the years including Metalwork, Woodwork, Junior and Leaving Certificate Maths, Arts & Crafts and Outdoor Pursuits. Currently we run cookery courses and office/business administration courses. Our premises are shared with Adult Literacy, BTEI, ESOL and Guidance, creating a vibrant atmosphere and a diverse learner and staff group. We value a balance between work and play and hold learner welfare as a priority. Local charity fundraising events, leisure and research trips are enjoyed annually to strengthen camaraderie and make the learner experience a dynamic and enjoyable one.

Teachers take a genuine interest in the learner's progression and success. The facilities are very well maintained and it has been a great way to make new friends. Some highlights have been: Art exhibitions in St. Michael's Theatre - a proud moment for learners to showcase their creativity, often for the first time. Fundraising for local and national charities - when teamwork really comes into play.

Tending to the allotment- for those who know (or want to get to know) their onions. And Fridays, our Pastry Baking & Desserts day when our cookery learners share their mouth-watering creations! Each year brings a mix of people with unique talents and interests that help to shape the year ahead.

COURSES

QQI Level 4, Culinary Skills

QQI Level 5, Professional Cookery

QQI Level 4, Information & Communications Technology Skills

QQI Level 4, Office Skills

QQI Level 5, Business Administration

JANET'S STORY

While considering returning to education at a mature age seemed daunting, it was well worth the effort. I had limited computer skills and learned so much which has all transferred to the job I have now. The Office Skills course gave me the confidence I needed having been out of the workplace for some time.



VTOS EDUCATION SERVICE DUNDRUM

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The Adult Education Service Dundrum, part of Dublin and Dún Laoghaire Education and Training Board, has been running VTOS programmes in two locations for over 20 years. The first is in Shankill, held in Shanganagh Park House community centre. The second course on Quinn's Road, Shankill, was moved to Dundrum in 2012. We have run many successful courses over the years through the support and dedication of our teachers, and participants are offered career guidance throughout the duration, as part of our programme. The majority of our learners have secured employment or have continued to a higher level course to increase their employability.

Each year the Adult Education Service holds an Awards Night to celebrate the success of our learners and present them with their Awards and Certificates. It is, for all our staff, the highlight of the year!

COURSES

QQI level 4, Information & Communications Technology Skills

QQI Level 4, Horticulture

QQI Level 3, English for the Workplace

QQI Level 5, Business Studies

ATP Computer Networking

SHARON'S STORY

Initially, I wished to retrain with a new skillset to enhance my prospects of employability, possibly in a new field or industry. Having worked in many fields including manufacturing, technical and sales in the past, the course gave me the opportunity to experience and see the skills required to work in an administration role. I got on well, considering that I had some personal health issues.

The teaching staff were very accommodating and every assistance was forthcoming, which went above and beyond expectations. On completion of the course, I can only applaud the efforts by tutors and staff in facilitating students' needs. It has helped me re-evaluate my capabilities and improved my confidence in my ability to learn new subjects and skills. Any doubts that I was too old to learn new skills have been dispelled and I hope to go forward on a new quest for further education (wait a minute, did I really write that???..... I have changed!).



VTOS COLÁISTE ÉILE

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Coláiste Éile is an umbrella Adult Education Centre in Thurles with VTOS being the anchor programme. The college was established in 1993 and it offers BTEI, Literacy, Community Education, Work Based Learning and Self-Financing night classes. We moved to a purpose built adult education facility in 2012 located in the town beside the railway station and our convenient location and modern facilities have allowed us expand our provision with a heavy emphasis on ICT. In recent years we have had great success in transitioning people back into local employment and facilitating adults to realise their dreams of further studies and qualifications.

VTOS provision consists of three programmes which extend across the twelve months of the year, with three semesters per annum and enrolment throughout the year. VTOS students have the option of doing one or two years at Coláiste Éile and there are also flexible Dispersed Mode options for those who wish to specialise for their second year of VTOS in one of our local PLC centres. VTOS remains a very relevant and necessary opportunity for the thousands who require additional time and focus in improving their knowledge, skills and competence. Since Coláiste Éile was established, we are fortunate to have shared in the personal growth and success of thousands of adults.

For example, many people have found their confidence and realised their potential. Academically, many former students have realised degrees, masters and even doctorates. Others have gone on to setting up successful businesses. Many more have entered or re-entered the workforce and progressed in their employment. Many have expanded their horizons and got involved in community projects, charitable works and sporting organisations to give something back. Every adult's learning opportunity was also one of personal growth.

Every year since the foundation of Coláiste Éile we have very much enjoyed our annual awards ceremony. 2020 will have been the only year to date where we couldn't celebrate the event as usual. This event is coupled with a sit-down lunch which allows recently graduated students get back together with class mates and have a proper catch up. In the earlier years of Coláiste Éile we also had many memorable art exhibitions celebrating the creative works of our students.



VTOS TRALEE

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Tralee VTOS opened its doors in October 1989 in the Technical School in Moyderwell and moved to ITT South Campus in 2006. Initially we offered Leaving Certificate only, but over the years the programme expanded and developed to suit the needs of our learners. We offer QQI level 3 to level 5 programmes. In addition, we have an extensive extracurricular programme that has taken us from Carrauntoohil to Paris, opening up both social and career opportunities.

Our graduates have succeeded in all walks of life and credit VTOS for their achievements. Tralee VTOS is a stand alone centre situated in the same campus as KCFE in Clash, Tralee. Courses are free to Adults over 21 years of age. A typical day is from 9.30 to 3.30, Monday to Friday, students may have time off during the day depending on what modules they have chosen. Tralee VTOS has been in existence for 31 years and has seen many students achieve their goals both personally and academically.

COURSES

For the academic year 20/21 Tralee VTOS will be providing courses in QQI Level 3 and QQI Level 4. These modules will help guide our learners to careers in Childcare, SNA, Healthcare, Cookery, Computing and many more.

TARA'S STORY

I left school in Fifth year, believing a job was better suited to me. Dissatisfied with my lot, I returned to education at Tralee VTOS. Thus my journey in education recommenced. It was a moment of great satisfaction when I successfully completed my Leaving Cert at the age of 23. In my early thirties I decided to return to education and am now completing a Post Graduate Diploma in Adult Education in Mary Immaculate College. As part of that I am back in VTOS for Teaching Practice.

The circle has been completed. Much of what I have achieved in my academic and working life is down to the support, guidance and encouragement I received from Tralee VTOS.



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VTOS arrived in Coláiste Íde in 1989 with one group of 18 men and two women. These students were quite a novelty in what was then the "Girls' Tech". All twenty participants wanted to sit the Leaving Certificate. VTOS became embedded in Finglas and beyond as neighbours, friends and relatives saw the transformation of the participants. Numbers increased over the years to 217 students over ten core programmes and PLC courses. The college has responded to the need to "educate for success in a changing world" by adapting to new cohorts of students and by adopting 21st century approaches to teaching and learning.

PROGRESSION

Six VTOS participants from Coláiste Íde have returned to CDET B to work as teachers, after graduating from TCD, NUI and DCU. Their knowledge of the student journey enhances our delivery, informs their fellow professionals and, in the words of a VTOS graduate: "Throughout my two years, the teachers in Coláiste Íde were invaluable in motivating me to learn, and their dedication and belief in me helped to build my confidence as a student." Diane Dempsey gained advanced entry and completed her BA (Hons) Early Childhood Education in two years, based on her VTOS Level 6 qualification and work experience.

COURSES

QQI Accounting Technician
 QQI Business
 QQI Childcare
 QQI Childcare Supervisor
 QQI Clerical Reception
 QQI Community Development
 QQI Healthcare
 QQI Horticulture
 QQI IT and Customer Care
 QQI Office Administration
 QQI Technical Support Agent
 CompTIA Certification
 Computer Systems and Networks
 Education and Skills for Industry
 Healthcare Supervisory Management
 Junior Certificate
 Leaving Certificate
 Net +
 PC Maintenance
 Professional Cookery
 General Education
 Security Studies
 Sport and Leisure Management
 Transport - CPC



VTOS TEACH AN LEINN

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VTOS has been operational in Nenagh for twenty seven years. It started in a room in Head office, Church Road. In 1995 VTOS moved to a beautifully restored building on Kenyon Street in Nenagh known as Teach an Leinn. Originally a twenty place centre, we now have a forty place allocation. Our students are mainly from Nenagh and its hinterlands. We offer Leaving and Junior Cert subjects and QQI Level 4 in General Learning and Information Communications Technology Skills. From time to time students are also offered courses that would give them qualifications that increase their opportunities for employment e.g. Manual Handling, Food Safety, Safe Pass etc. We work closely with the business community so students can gain relevant work experience and employment.

JULIAN'S STORY

Last year I began to attend school in Teach an Leinn. It was forty years since I had been in school where I had failed miserably. Within months everything had changed and I have grown in confidence and was surpassing my wildest dreams educationally. For the first time in a long time I feel I belong with my fellow students. I have discovered a love and a talent for Art that I intend to pursue in the coming year.



VTOS CRUMLIN COLLEGE OF FURTHER EDUCATION

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The VTOS programme has been a part of the college for almost 20 years. I have been the co-ordinator for eight years. I have seen the benefits at first-hand how it allows students to partake in courses that otherwise they would have been unable to attend. Many of our students have progressed to 3rd level in a number of areas. We have seen students become chefs, personal trainers, beauticians, accountants. As all our VTOS places are dispersed throughout the college, the programmes delivered are in the Sports Department, the Beauty Department, Business Department, Tourism, Hairdressing, Cookery and Fashion. I have seen one student who came to college very shy and unsure of himself and is now running his own personal training gym. He is now a very positive and confident person who puts his achievements down to the help of VTOS. We have three students who completed their training with us and are now teaching in another college.



VTOS ATHLONE

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Athlone VTOS is now situated in Garrycastle Training Centre in Athlone. We were initially in a shared centre with Literacy and BTEI but now we are in a campus that was traditionally a FAS centre. We have found the campus set-up at Garrycastle to be beneficial to students and staff alike - with excellent facilities and with crossover progression between various courses. Every year, we have a graduation ceremony in a local hotel where the students receive their certificates. We usually ask the AEO and Director of Further Education and Training to present the certificates as well as inviting the Mayor and local dignitaries.

The highlight of the night is always when some of the students speak about their experiences - especially those who have progressed to the workplace or third level. It has always been very inspirational. Athlone VTOS is a 50 place centre normally. We deliver three QQI level 5 certificates.

COURSES

QQI Level 5, Art, Craft & Design

QQI Level 5, Software Development

QQI Level 5, Business Administration

HANNA'S STORY

One of our students in the past who stands out (though there are many) is Hanna, who joined us as a part-time learner in our then BTEI programme in General Studies. She left school at 15 and was a cleaner. She was lacking in confidence but had great energy and enthusiasm. She had no computer knowledge but picked it up really quickly. She progressed to the full time VTOS programme where she took on Business Administration, but did computer programming as extra, and achieved Distinctions in all! She went to AIT at third level and studied Social Care and was very successful. She now works full time at a Troubled Youth support programme and loves her chosen career.



VTOS NEWBRIDGE

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COURSES

- QQI Level 4, Employment Skills
- QQI Level 5, Health Service Skills
- QQI Level 5, Multimedia Production
- QQI Level 5, Business
- QQI Level 6, Business

LIAM'S STORY

VTOS is a very special place. A place where you will make many friends. From the start I was provided with amazing mentoring from tutors that treat you as an equal and without judgement no matter what your academic ability is. I am currently going into my second year of my degree studying Law and Criminology in Maynooth. Through VTOS, I gained a work placement and later a working contract with the Garda Youth Diversion project in Newbridge. The skills and confidence I gained while attending VTOS showed me I could take control of my future and make it into what I wanted it to be.



VTOS SHANAGOLDEN

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VTOS Shanagolden is part of the FET Campus in beautiful rural West Limerick. VTOS is a 20 place centre with learners studying a range of subjects in business, information technology and art for the past 22 years. Career and personal guidance is an integral part of the course. Learner life, though busy academically, includes activities focusing on personal development and promoting positive mental wellbeing. The activities have included rowing on the river Deel with Desmond Rowing Club and visits to art galleries. We celebrate Limerick Lifelong Learning Festival each year with workshops in art and IT. Links with local industry lead to productive work placements and future employment for learners.

In May each year we host an art exhibition in the local library displaying learners' work in both drawing and painting which includes a variety of media; acrylic, pastel, charcoal, pencil, collage and mixed media covering a range of subject matter. The annual summer outing over the years, has taken us from Dublin, to Cobh, Kildare and Kilkenny and in times past Paris and Amsterdam.

Our celebration of academic achievement takes place in September with graduating and current learners speaking about and sharing their achievements with family, friends and invited guests.

COURSES

QQI Level 5, Information Processing

QQI, Level 5, Business Administration

PAT AND STEPHANIE'S STORY

One of the nicest success stories from VTOS Shanagolden is that of Pat and Stephanie who met on the course in 2012 when Pat was in 2nd year. Pat had been made redundant as a warehouse supervisor and Stephanie had been made redundant from Dell. "I am glad now that I stayed for the 2 years as it is the best thing I ever did". Pat and Stephanie fell in love over their shared interest of bookkeeping and got married in July 2018. VTOS learners and staff happily joined them to celebrate. Pat completed an Internship with an accountancy firm after VTOS, which led to fulltime employment. Stephanie is also employed fulltime at a local retail store. Success all-round!



VTOS ATHY

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VTOS Athy was established over 25 years ago by co-ordinator, Mary Campbell and supported by a dedicated team of committed teachers, many of whom still work with VTOS today. Initially, VTOS operated from the old model school in Athy, which was later damaged by a fire, causing VTOS to move to its current location on the Carlow Road. That centre later became a Further Education and Training multiplex centre delivering other services to the community including Youthreach, Back to Education Initiative and the Adult Basic Education Services. More recently, our teaching has been complemented with online and blended learning delivery, allowing VTOS to continue to deliver learning programmes during the COVID-19 pandemic.

On an annual basis, we host and promote many extracurricular activities for our VTOS students, including the Aontas Adult Learning Festival, College Awareness Week, Career Fairs, Company visits, and other student educational trips. Students also organise charity collections and coffee mornings. We host an annual Art exhibition of student work, and of course our QQI Awards Presentation Ceremony.

COURSES

- QQI Level 5, Healthcare
- QQI Level 5, Business and E-Business
- QQI Level 5, Applied Social Studies
- QQI Level 5, Art
- QQI Level 5, Computer and Network Maintenance
- QQI Level 4, Return to Learning

SUCCESS STORY

I found the knowledge I gained while doing the Healthcare course with KWETB Athy, to be a tremendous foundation and invaluable for starting 3rd level education. Addressing how to study again following a long absence, completing assignments and referencing, which I had never done before, revising and preparing for examinations and learning word processing, was very beneficial for 3rd level studies. I found the teachers very approachable and supportive. I would highly recommend adult education with VTOS Athy for anyone considering it.



VTOS BALBRIGGAN

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Balbriggan VTOS opened in 2000 with a twenty-place core group. We started in a prefab with access to a small computer room in the Adult Education Service building. The co-ordinator at the time was Madeleine O'Regan. Balbriggan VTOS now has 60 places in a core group and we have just recently moved into a new school building with excellent facilities, including a dedicated beauty therapy room and two spacious computer rooms. Balbriggan VTOS courses incorporate various technology enhanced learning strategies where staff and students use technologies such as ipads, Office 365, Moodle, Teams, Zoom and much more.

The Adult Education Service, Balbriggan and Swords, hold an annual graduation ceremony in a local hotel each year. This event is a celebration of all the hard work and achievements of students and staff. The event is always successful which shows in the beaming smiles of students in their graduation gowns. Many months of hard work are acknowledged and it is a chance for everyone to reflect on their success.

COURSES

QQI Level 6, Business

QQI Level 6, SNA Specialist (ECCE Award)

QQI Level 4, English Language Development

QQI Level 5, Beauty Therapy

QQI Level 5, Healthcare Service Skills

SUCCESS STORY

My tutor, Brid, really went above and beyond to help me. She helped to set up a mock interview the day before my interview for a job. She also got one of her current students, Caroline, who actually works in the healthcare facility to contact me. Her suggestions and feedback helped the interview to flow and I was much better prepared. Prior to the interview, I already had a meeting with Orla (guidance counsellor) and her advice, "to always ask for feedback", helped me to secure the job. The staff in Balbriggan VTOS have been very effective and I am very grateful.



VTOS

IONAD BREISOIDEACHAIS

ROS MUC

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Ionad Breisoideachais Ros Muc has been in existence since 1999. We are a Gaeltacht centre, run completely through Irish. We are based on the Atlantic coast in south west Connemara in Co. Galway. Our learners travel to our centre from a 30 mile radius. We have a staff of five people and love what we do. As it is a twenty-place centre, lifelong friendships are formed while on the course. We hold graduations every year in a local hotel of our choice. We combine this occasion with our many BTEI Childcare, IT and healthcare support students. Our summer annual outings include such trips as Kylemore Abbey, Leitir Móir Heritage museum and Westport House. We have a yearly Christmas dinner, where we celebrate our achievements for the year.

COURSES

QQI Level 5, Business Administration Skills

ICDL

SUCCESS STORY

All our students are a success story in their own personal way. Since 1999 we have been reaching out to job seekers to improve their level of education and to join a community of learners where there is an emphasis on positive mental health as well as education.



VTOS BELMULLET FE

THERESA MCMULLIN

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The Belmullet VTOS programme started in October 2001 on the site of the old Warner's factory. Since 2003 we have been located in Chapel Street in Belmullet. We are a twenty-place centre, sharing our location with part time courses. We try to respond to the education and training needs of people in the Erris area. In previous years we did a number of field trips in relation to the tourism programme. Unfortunately this is not possible at present but we do hope to resume this whenever possible.

COURSES

QQI Level 5, Business Administration
QQI Level 5, Tourism with Business

MARY'S STORY

This course has helped me to upskill in many areas including Bookkeeping and IT. It has also helped to increase my confidence and communications skills. The supports available allowed me to balance studying fulltime with having a young family.



VTOS CORK COLLEGE OF COMMERCE

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VTOS in Cork College of Commerce is a second chance education and training programme which provides courses of up to two years duration for unemployed people. The Scheme has proved to be a great success in opening up learning and progression opportunities for people who have been marginalised by unemployment. Students on VTOS can pursue subjects in the Adult Leaving Certificate programmes or awards certified by Quality & Qualifications Ireland (QQI) at level 5 or 6. All full-time courses available at Cork College of Commerce are available through VTOS dispersed mode.



VTOS MONAGHAN INSTITUTE

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As a FET college run under the auspices of CMETB, Monaghan Institute has offered VTOS learners the opportunity to participate in PLC programmes since 1992. Each year Monaghan Institute has 40 dispersed VTOS students, spread over a wide range of courses in our college.

Our VTOS learners come to us from varied backgrounds and with different life skills and abilities, so returning to education can be daunting for some. However, through the strong support networks which MI provides, these learners succeed on an annual basis confidently, graduating from their chosen course. Some VTOS students decide to continue their studies and progress to degree programmes in HE colleges, while others get work in their particular fields.

The VTOS Scheme has been very beneficial to eligible students in the Monaghan catchment area and without it, many long term unemployed/lone parents would not have been able to partake or succeed in returning to their studies.

COURSES

- QQI Level 5, Business/Pharmacy Counter Assistant
- QQI Level 5/6, Early Childhood Care & Education
- QQI Level 5, Nursing/Healthcare/Applied Social Studies
- QQI Level 5/6, Sport & Recreation/Tourism
- QQI Level 5/6, Digital Media/Software Development
- QQI Level 5/6, Hairdressing/Beauty Therapy
- QQI Level 5, Engineering/Architectural Technology
- QQI Level 5, Animal Science
- QQI Level 5, Liberal Arts

MARTIN'S STORY

Martin Fox joined VTOS in 2011 having left school early without passing his Junior Certificate. He had a passion for sports and so came to Monaghan Institute (MI) to study the Sports & Leisure Management course Level 5. He continued in MI and successfully passed the Level 6 Sports Development programme in 2013. Martin then decided to apply for a degree in Business & Management Practice in IT Carlow. In 2017, he graduated with an honours degree and was also voted Student of the Year. He is currently employed by CMETB, working in Carrickmacross Youthreach.

ASHLING'S STORY

Ashling Burns joined VTOS in 2015 after being made redundant when the company she had worked for closed down. She applied for a Level 5 course in Travel & Tourism in Monaghan Institute and successfully passed. She continued her studies in MI in 2016, completing the Advanced Certificate in IT Level 6. Then in 2017, Ashling successfully secured a place on the Bachelor of Business Level 8 Degree with DKIT. She is currently studying a Level 9 post grad in Data Analytics in DKIT.



VTOS KILMACTHOMAS

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VTOS - Start Your Own Business Programme is located in the Kilmacthomas Adult Education Centre since 2001. The programme was guided to success by Frank McQuillan, until his retirement in 2018. The Enterprise Development Programme provides a tailored suite of modules to suit each individual business idea. The course enables the learner to explore self-employment and all its attributes. Learners work in a classroom setting two days a week, where they gain the knowledge and skills to start a business. They gain hands-on business experience in their fledgling business for the remainder of the week.

We have had several success stories over the years and numerous learners have started their own business. Students have the opportunity to visit "Showcase Ireland" and the "Spring Fair" in Birmingham. As part of the course, learners develop a website and digital platforms to support their start-up business. We also work closely with the Local Enterprise Office and the Department of Employment and Social Protection to support the learner at the business start-up stage.

SUCCESS STORY

Vivien O'Malley Ceramics, Irish Gourmet Butter, Earth Sound Rhythms and Reflexology by Caroline to name just a few, while others use the skills and qualifications obtained during the course to access third level education. Everything we do is business related.



VTOS GALWAY CITY

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We are part of Galway Roscommon ETB and are located on the Tuam Road, Galway City. VTOS Galway City was established in 1989 and is a centre dedicated to providing adults with further or "second chance" education opportunities and consistent with that aim, we offer 10 courses which are all QQI accredited.

Our facilities include four computer rooms, sound engineering studio, TV/film studio, art and craft rooms, photography studio and general classrooms. We had a very successful Art Exhibition in May 2018 held in Westside library. Our students had a selection of their paintings, drawings and ceramics on display. Their teachers, families and friends attended to see the results of their hard work during the year and spent a very enjoyable afternoon viewing the finished pieces.

COURSES

QQI Level 4/5, General Studies
QQI Level 4/5, Business Studies
QQI Level 4/5, Childcare
QQI Level 4/5, Health Care
QQI Level 4/5, Film Studies
QQI Level 4/5, Sound Engineering
QQI Level 4/5, Art and Design



VTOS DÚN LAOGHAIRE

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Instagram: www.instagram.com/dfei_ireland/

Youtube: www.youtube.com/user/DFEIInstitute

Vimeo: www.vimeo.com/channels/dfeitvandfilm

Soundcloud: www.soundcloud.com/dfei_ireland

A Dublin and Dún Laoghaire Education and Training Board (DDLETB) college, Dún Laoghaire Further Education Institute (DFEI) provides day and night courses as well as apprenticeships. DFEI provides excellent training in aspects of media and sound, health, design, sustainable energy, computing and technology, and arts and the humanities. Other activities include end-of-year exhibition and graduation ceremony. The skills, knowledge and experience gained at DFEI places students and apprentices on the path to a successful career in their chosen vocational area.

COURSES

QQI Level 5/6, Animal Health Care

QQI Level 5/6, Craft & Design

QQI Level 5/6, Construction

QQI Level 5/6, Arts

QQI Level 5/6, Business and Humanities

QQI Level 5/6, Community, Healthcare and Nursing

QQI Level 5/6, Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths

QQI Level 5/6, Media, Film, Journalism, Radio and Sound

QQI Level 6, Edexcel/BTEC Award and a SOLAS Award Advanced Craft Certificate

FROM VTOS STUDENT TO VTOS CO-ORDINATOR

After school I started working in sales. After a lucky break I got a contract on a Government funded project, however the remuneration for this position was linked not only to your experience but also to your qualifications.

I now had a desire to gain a qualification, albeit financial! So, I became a VTOS student, gained a diploma in International Trade and Marketing as a result, and to my surprise discovered a desire for lifelong learning which led to a further three degrees. I am now the VTOS Co-ordinator in DFEI.



VTOS WATERFORD

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In 2020, Waterford VTOS celebrated 25 years of offering accredited education and training courses to the unemployed in Waterford City and the border counties of Kilkenny, Wexford, Carlow and Tipperary. Over the years many of our graduates have found employment in the public and private sectors, progressed to further education and Third Level (WIT, UCC, Limerick School of Art and Design) or started their own businesses with the mentorship of our local Enterprise Office and the local Kite Design Centre. Our centre is committed to offering courses that are responsive to the needs of our learners and their progression. We celebrated twenty five years of VTOS in 2020, and held our annual awards ceremony on 5th March, 2020. The Graduate Fashion Design show is an annual event for us each year, usually held in March.

COURSES

QQI Level 5, Fashion Design

QQI Level 5, Interior Design

QQI Level 5, Art Craft and Design

QQI Level 5, Information Processing

QQI Level 5, Business Administration

MARIANNE'S STORY

Marianne Heaphy is a former graduate of QQI Level 5 Interior Design and is now the successful owner of an Interior Design business, "The Revamp Tramp". This eco-friendly business focuses on furniture revamping, re-purposing and giving workshops in upcycling. Her love of upcycling first began in the "Materials & Finishes" class in Waterford VTOS. From VTOS, she completed an Honours BA in Visual Arts (WIT) and identified a business niche for upcycling furniture and workshops. Marianne has featured on Ireland AM and RSVP.



VTOS KILLARNEY

MARY A. O'CONNOR

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The Killarney VTOS vision of education has evolved since our commencement in 1993. At the core of Killarney VTOS has been the broad understanding of education as lifelong and an instrumental life skill. Central to this is the learners' well-being, enabling him/her to develop, grow and commence their journey to reach their potential.

The learning and education being delivered has adapted to meet the changing educational, upskilling and personal development needs of the learner. Learners are being prepared and equipped with self-awareness, self-knowledge and a relevant skillset to competently enter the world of work or progress to further education and training. The QQI/ICDL certificates that the learners achieve through the VTOS programme are proof of their commitment, determination, hard work and perseverance.

At Killarney VTOS we believe that the centre plays a vital role in the promotion of positive mental health. We aim to provide a safe and supportive environment for building life skills and resilience amongst our learners. This year we sought recognition of our work on promoting positive mental health through an application for a renewal of the AMBER FLAG initiative, which is run in conjunction with Pieta House. A range of projects were carried out by the learners including our Tree of Hope: Students designed positive affirmation quotes on little cards and these were then displayed on a special wooden tree that was designed by one of our students.

A virtual graduation night was held in November 2020 to celebrate the achievements of all the Killarney VTOS graduates of 2020. All learners did exceptionally well despite the COVID lockdown. Killarney VTOS staff and students participated in the Radio Kerry Christmas Jumper Appeal in aid of their neighbours St. Vincent de Paul.

COURSES

- QQI Level 3/4, Information & Communication Technology Skills
- QQI Level 3/4, Employment Skills
- QQI Level 5, Communications, Work Experience & Payroll
- ICDL/Advanced ICDL and Expert ICDL standard
- Manual Handling
- Fire Safety Training
- HACCP
- First Aid

RUTH'S STORY

Past student, Ruth Conway, held her first solo art exhibition at the Killarney library. The exhibition was opened by VTOS art teacher Ronnie Moore. The exhibition was a great success and featured paintings created by Ruth since childhood, during her time with VTOS, her PLC course and culminating in work completed at the National College of Art and Design, where Ruth graduated with an honours degree in fine art.

SEAN'S STORY

Sean Moraghan who graduated from Killarney VTOS in May 2019 launched his book 'Days of the Blackthorn' on 16th January 2020 in Killarney library. The book is about fiction fighters of Kerry. Killarney VTOS staff and his classmates were very proud to be with him on the night.



VTOS SALLYNOGGIN

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Here in SCFE, we offer dispersed VTOS places across all of our courses. This means that the applicant is free to choose any course in the college. Most of our VTOS students progress to further or higher education or to employment or self-employment.

COURSES

QQI Level 5/6, Creative Studies

QQI Level 5/6, Dance

QQI Level 5/6, Performing Arts

QQI Level 5/6, Fashion

QQI Level 5/6, Hair & Beauty

QQI Level 5/6, Fitness

QQI Level 5/6, Health and Wellbeing

QQI Level 5/6, Childhood Education

QQI Level 5/6, Social Studies

QQI Level 5/6, Youth Work and Disability Studies

QQI Level 5/6, Tourism and Travel



VTOS DUNGARVAN

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VTOS Dungarvan is located on Wolfe Tone Road in the old VEC Technical School. VTOS Dungarvan has been offering educational and training courses to adult learners under the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme since 1997. VTOS Dungarvan is committed to the delivery of a quality education service in a supportive learning environment. Over the years, many of our graduates have progressed on to further education, training and employment.

VTOS Dungarvan holds an annual art exhibition every year to show case the art work produced by the students over their two years on VTOS.

COURSES

QQI Level 4, General Learning
 QQI Level 4, General Learning (Business)
 QQI Level 5, Business Administration
 QQI Level 5, Tourism with Business
 QQI Level 5, Art

JOAN ALTMAN'S STORY

Having decided only at the last minute to enrol for the Art, Craft & Design course, I was lucky to be accepted. Having left school over 40 years ago, I arrived on the first day of term a little nervous and apprehensive; it was a very large group of twenty-two adults, of varying ages and backgrounds. As the weeks progressed, a few people dropped out for various reasons but the team members that remained, grew together and were all eager to learn. We became a great team that grew stronger as time went by, helping each other where possible. I came to the course not knowing anything about computers or maths but with the amazing patience and help of tutors and encouragement of fellow students, I achieved distinction marks in both.

I had never done any weaving or Batik before but after the initial fear of both and again with great tutoring, I have become comfortable with both crafts. I would recommend this course to anyone, whether you've dabbled in art in the past or a complete novice. On this course, you will find the inner "Artiste" and will excel at something you never thought possible while enjoying the comradeship of your new-found friends.



VTOS TIPPERARY TOWN

SINEAD BRENNAN

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Our VTOS centre is in the process of being set up. We are at the very early stages of developing a programme for our learners. We hope to deliver QQI level 5 Sports and Recreation and Business Administration. As this centre is in its infancy, we do not yet have learner testimonials. As of yet none have taken place, but we are getting there!



VTOS DRUMSHANBO

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The VTOS programme has been an integral part of further education in Drumshanbo for the past 25 years. The programme was originally delivered under the supervision of Drumshanbo Vocational School for the first 22 years where QQI Level 5 programmes such as Traditional Irish Music, Sound Production and Business were successfully run. In September 2017, the programme moved to the new Further Education and Training Centre in the Enterprise Centre, Drumshanbo.

Every year the students of the Traditional Irish Music course host a Céilí for charity. This is widely supported with song, dance, music playing, poems and storytelling, entertaining the crowds.

Every year the centre recognises and celebrates the work and achievements of all students. We fully acknowledge that success is not always about gaining distinctions in all subjects but the improvement in social skills, confidence and employability.

In 2020 the centre ran a Health and Wellbeing programme with a view to raising awareness of mental health issues.

COURSES

QQI Level 5, Business Administration

QQI Level 5, Health, Nutrition and Food Science

QQI Level 5, Tourism with Business

QQI Level 5, Traditional Irish Music

SUCCESS STORY

I recently finished a QQI level 6 Business course at the FET Centre, Drumshanbo. I was very impressed with the centre's facilities and how organized the centre is, especially considering the rural location. I had the opportunity to do different courses throughout my career in capital cities such as Bucharest and Madrid. This FET Centre has everything to envy, compared to the ones I have attended in such big cities. From the moment you walk through the door it is obvious the centre is well run, professional, and it gives you that feeling you are walking into a friendly environment.



VTOS CASTLEBAR

PAULA DONNELLAN

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Our centre was one of the first to be established. We are a forty place centre in the middle of the county town. We offer a wide range of subjects and awards; Heritage, Language and European Studies, Business, Tourism, Hospitality. Our students have achieved enormous success progressing to GMIT in the town, further and third level education, to the world of work or self-employment.

Every year we provide students with the opportunity to avail of local, national and International trips; we have formed strong links with Paris and Bruges. Our aim is to give adults who may not have achieved all they wanted through the traditional schooling system, a second chance at education. At Castlebar VTOS the emphasis is on what you can do and what you are interested in doing.

COURSES

QQI Level 5, Cultural and Heritage Studies
QQI Level 5, Language and European Studies
QQI Level 5, Hospitality Operations
QQI Level 5, Business Administration
QQI Level 5, Tourism with Business
ICDL

ANDREW LEONARD'S STORY

VTOS started as a somewhat revolutionary template in adult learning. Many years later it is now evolutionary in a sense that many of its students having initially arrived stumped and stooped so to speak in their self-perceived lack of skills leave straightened, upright and brimming in confidence.

VTOS is a blueprint for the 'learning curious' and for those who wish to 'stretch their minds' and update their skills. This can be achieved through the various modules across its spectrum including art, digital photography, computer skills or communications to mention but a few.

The emphasis is on self-assessment, assignment, assurance and soft persuasion and that combined with its excellent tutors makes VTOS a jewel in the crown of adult learning. Its all-embracing, non-effacing and accommodating ethos make it a unique equal opportunities educator in the field of adult education.

This is not conveyor belt learning producing yellow pack education. It is its own unique brand, which blends its own methods and underpins it by its informal social ambiance. This makes it a relaxed environment conducive to teaching instruction. It is essentially 'a social club with a whiteboard'.

So from the whiteboard to the springboard, graduating students are delivered to the world like parcels of determination with their confidence on steroids. VTOS really is a mosaic of talent right across the board. Let's not make any potential deficit of funding issues smother the surplus of talent and opportunities that it creates.



VTOS ROSCOMMON

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YouTube: www.youtube.com/watch?v=cD0ojW6-82Y&feature=youtu.be

Facebook: www.facebook.com/vtosroscommontown

VTOS Roscommon has been going strong since the early 90's. It is located in Roscommon town and caters for not only the town itself but also the smaller surrounding towns in the County of Roscommon. It has been a lifeline for many individuals returning to education. It has allowed individuals to gain employment and progress to third level education. VTOS Roscommon not only assists individuals in upskilling but also assists in gaining or regaining self-confidence and belief in oneself.

COURSES

QQI level 4, ICT Skills

QQI Level 5, Business Administration

QQI Level 5, Health Service Skills

SUCCESS STORY

VTOS Roscommon is a great stepping stone for getting back into learning and education.

The tutors are all very supportive and helpful. If you are thinking about giving it a go, I would highly recommend it as you will learn new skills, meet new people, and make friends along the way.

30 YEARS



GREENING THE LEARNING LANDSCAPE

The coming year is one of more anniversaries, always a good time for reflection and review. On VTOS at 30 my immediate thought must be one of Buíochas for the vision and spirit of its founders. As frontline teachers it gave us practical support, solidarity, cáirdeas and direction. Its many conferences allowed us meet the pioneers of equality and inclusion from around the country and go home with a new vision and confidence.

What a year 2020 has been? The new virus, new government, new words, lockdown, social distancing, R number, zoom, home learning, hybrid learning, it can be difficult to find the positives and strategies to deal with this changed learning landscape. In the bigger picture, we have David Attenborough, Luke O'Neill and our own Mary Robinson laying out the challenges to face the virus, our carbon emissions, biodiversity loss, addiction to packaging, plastic, migration, the widening income and resources gap, with so many of these interlinked.

It would indeed be a fantastic programme that would address all of these, but let us never underestimate the value of an open education centre, including and hearing the stories of our people on the margins. Doing this in a setting that affirms the gender, race, ability, nationality or income status has always been an option in VTOS and providing a multi-sensory atmosphere can enhance the whole learning community. While we hope for a new green deal at international level, practical steps are being taken in many centres, some of which are listed here. The plant in the classroom. One of the simplest ways to change the focus and energy flow in any classroom is to introduce a plant. Immediately heads are turned away from an extra busy teacher and a new window of colour, shape, scent, oxygen, science, art, geography and history has opened up. In fact plants anywhere are quite easy to grow and even in January a humble hyacinth bulb in flower can deliver well. There's a variety of evidence of the benefits of plant therapy in the better recovery rates of patients who can look out a window at nature, a tree or a bird table.

Window boxes and pots. Getting onto senior hurling now, the possibilities are endless, just look at Limerick! Find or make the biggest containers possible, add a bag of peat free compost, some garden soil, baby plants or bulbs and you're away. The outdoor plants need to be hardy to face frost and wind especially from October to April, or else cover them with fleece before the temperature really drops. Strawberries, tomatoes, hanging bee friendly nasturtiums, scented sweet peas, herbs and an array of bedding plants are all useful. Somewhere in there add a wow plant, Dwarf sunflower in a pot, Blueberry or Camellia in ericaceous acidic compost, Helleborus for a great New Year flower, lots of bold bulb possibilities, snowdrops, alliums, wild garlic.

That single bed. About two square metres and a second one if you have the space is ideal, as now you're into independent living soil. Garlic or onion sets are a gift for education centres, one clove of garlic planted in February, they will give a decent bulb in September with ten cloves. No snail or slug will touch them and the added value will beat any bank or hedge fund investor. Who said nature wasn't bountiful? Early sprouted potatoes, planted and covered with fleece mid-February will have an edible crop by the end of May. Radishes, lettuce and an array of salads combined with peas, beans, and herbs will give colour and taste all year round. The compost bin even if the garden is tiny, the act of recycling old plant material or vegetable peelings in the centre itself is closing the loop and showing how a circular economy can work. Rat proof bins are available, which in a few months will give quality humus to further the life of your soil and the quality of its produce.

An herb spiral. This takes up very little space, a few square metres and can be an artistic feature made from locally sourced stone. If made near a damp area it can include most of the herbs from damp loving mints to the drier mountain thymes on the higher up soil.

Solar powered trickling pond. All of us have roofs with water retention and makes harvesting a real possibility. A square metre of solar panel and pump will give year round, trickling sound and aeration of the water in the pond, which can soothe the most stressed learner or teacher, especially on a Friday.

A mini nursery. Now this may sound posh, it can be as simple as a few fish boxes and a bag of sand. Trees are the gift to the educational world and match perfectly with our September return. Collect oak acorns, hazel nuts, good sized sweet chestnuts or beech in your local park, float them in a bucket of water and the ones that sink store in the sand boxes until March. Cover with wire mesh to protect from birds or mice. Have one litre recycled milk cartons ready washed and cut at the bottom corners, with some soil of garden compost and you have a mini nursery. Stored outside, these baby trees will need minimal maintenance, just a watering in dry summer months and are ready for sale within a year. A single mature oak or beech contains up to two acres of leaf surface area for carbon capture and growing or planting one around Féile Bride is a powerful educational experience as well as an act of hope.

Fruit trees. If you have the space go for native, heritage varieties. Appletown Wonder or Irish Peach will have flowers in April, fruit in September and provide a great space under which to meditate. Irish Seed Savers in Scarriff have a fine range and a new online catalog. The young or middle aged Isaac Newtons of the future may just be in our classrooms needing a spot for that vision quest. The outdoor classroom. These really came into use this year. They are in fact liberation for the whole learning community. Socially distanced, with excellent ventilation, the added sound effects of birds, a distant barking dog and the smell of fresh fennel, what self-respecting virus would go near such a place? They can be as simple as a grove of trees with semi-circular seating, some shelter from the west wind, a wall or good sized hedge is a bonus. A good sized poly-tunnel is a multipurpose facility for crops all year round as well as for teaching in.

Leave a wilderness area. Working in a centre where there never was a dedicated gardener even on a part-time basis, it was easy to leave wilderness areas. But to keep these from being seen as just untidy, or neglected, they need to be planned, with signs explaining they are natural conservation areas for wildlife and pollinators. These spaces are a key to rebuilding our diversity and repairing the only planet we have.

Any of the above will enhance the learning experience and it's important to remember greening doesn't have to be perfect. Nature as well as being bountiful is forgiving, especially towards busy teachers. The great joy is seeing many of our learners take ownership of these areas and become themselves multipliers of the earth care message. If we are to effectively heal the earth, the first steps may be in healing ourselves. Earth care, people care and fair share have meaning now more than ever.

A few references and resources here may also help.

"A life on our planet" Film and Book David Attenborough.

"Climate Justice" Mary Robinson.

"The year round organic school garden" available from Irish Seed Savers Scarriff.

"The Organic Salad Garden" Joy Larkcom.

"Four Seasons Harvest" Eliot Coleman.

*"Never mind the B#llo*cks Here's the Science" Professor Luke O'Neill.*

"Grow a New Body" Alberto Villoldo.

Jim McNamara



WHEN YOU WERE THERE

When you were there did you sit all alone
Escaping the noise of a new crowd unknown
Did technology, voices, words and concepts
Make you wonder what made you take those crazy steps.

Did you find a corner with one you could trust
To tell your own story and how you felt lost
Then hear from another a journey the same
A path through the forest, escape from the rain.

Looking south in the morning did you see floating clouds
Illusions you held or a censor so loud
Anxieties, fears that would not let you rest
Did you find your own corner for your vision quest.

Did science awake you to epigenetics
A freedom to grow beyond life predetermined
Did the art in the hallway show you cabbage with stripes
From purple and green to a rainbow delight.

Did you see the sunrise at solstice in awe
Make a reindeer of willow and watch its antlers grow
Looking east did the moon linger on in the sky
With a spirit of oneness to open your eye.

Did your body awaken your spirit grow wings
Join curlews and wild geese as winter begins
Migrate like the swallows in search of a home
Face storms and detention but still hold your own.

Did you find the seeds to plant a new garden
Taste food from a soil that was living and warm
Share your good news now with reason and balance
Turn earth ship around and with hope face the challenge.



Jim McNamara

Jim Mc Namara was Chairperson of the N.A.V.C. for a number of years and co-ordinator of VTOS at An tIonad Glas the Organic College in Dromcollogher from 1991 until his retirement in 2014.

VTOS AND ME

Donal J Farrell, VTOS Co-ordinator at Boyle VTOS Centre

Roughly around 1982/83, I became unemployed and this continued for 8 years, during which time I lost all my self confidence and esteem. I got the chance to join VTOS in 1993 as a satellite student studying an NCEE – National Certificate in Electronics Engineering Course at the then Sligo IT College. My course ran two nights per week and all day on a Saturday for labs. This was for three years. On my second year as a VTOS student I heard from the Computer Teacher at Boyle VTOS Centre that he was leaving the following week. He, knowing my skills with IT, said I should apply for the job. I was a bit hesitant but he told me that the interviews were on that very day. He insisted that I contact Tommy Murray, the then AEO with Roscommon VEC. I did so and managed to score an interview at 1pm that day. This interview was the longest I had ever experienced in my life about one hour and 45 minutes long. The interviewers seemed to focus on two things, my long term experience with computers and also the fact that I was then the scout leader with the 1st and 11th Roscommon scout troupe based in Boyle, Co Roscommon and to which I gave a total of thirteen years of service.

The following morning I received a phone call from the AEO that I had got the job on three months probation to see how it would go. He told me to get into the VTOS Centre and shadow the leaving IT Teacher, which I did and I started my teaching job on October 16th 1995. As it turned out I was now teaching computers in the same very classroom my own father was to teach in, years before but never actually getting the job because he did not have the Ceard Teastas in Irish. I got through my first set of computer exams the following year. I also ended up teaching the PLC girls at Boyle College of Business which shared the same building as VTOS.

In 2000, the VTOS Co-ordinator Pat O’Flanagan retired and I took on the role of Co-ordinator. I have been there as Co-ordinator since then. I have really enjoyed this period of time in my life with the many different interactions with students over this period. Mattie Kinsley another VTOS student who had been unemployed joined the VTOS course in Roscommon and subsequently became a teacher in Boyle VTOS Centre and is still teaching there today. During this time I became a parents representative on Roscommon VEC and was there through the change over to Galway and Roscommon Education and Training Board and served on the first board. I am now in the position as I approach the age of 65 to retire in August 2022 and I am really looking forward to this new stage in my life and I owe it all to VTOS.

This second chance education program in my opinion is the best thing that ever happened in this country. It gave many good people a second chance to get a proper education and many have used this as a stepping stone to further their careers. Many learners continued on to do various diplomas and degrees, some even went on and started their own businesses. I also had the opportunity to join the NAVC as an executive member and have served on the National Conference Organisation Committee for the past number of years while also working alongside Mr Ray O’Connor in looking after the NAVC Website. There is no better course to sink your teeth into than a VTOS Course which are many and quite varied across the country. In finishing I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the fantastic teachers and co-ordinators I have had the pleasure to both work closely with and have met over the last 25 years.

PS: To anyone out there thinking of doing a course there is nothing better than a VTOS Course to get you started. The hardest thing is saying yes on day one. I can guarantee you will thoroughly enjoy it if you do.....



Donal J Farrell

MATTIE KINSLEY

Communications and Work Practice Teacher with Boyle VTOS Centre

I participated in the VTOS scheme between the years 1993-1995. The scheme was a new concept at the time which gave individuals a second chance at education. Run under the auspices of the Co. Roscommon VEC, It involved learners participating in a number of modular subjects over a two year period, earning a Level 5 certificate. First from NCVA, then FETAC and now QQI. The support individuals received while attending the course was excellent, enabling learners to progress into relevant areas mentioned above.

In 1995, I undertook a B.A. Degree course at U.C.G. (N.U.I.G.) successfully completing the course in 1998. I applied to Co. Roscommon VEC for a vacant teaching position on the course and was successful in obtaining the position.

Now after twenty two years, I have witnessed both personally and professionally the positive outcomes of VTOS and I would highly recommend it to all individuals who are looking for a second chance opportunity.

Mattie Kinsley



30 YEARS

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