

## School Psychology in Ireland

### 1. Context of school psychology

#### Geography

Eire or Ireland in the English language is located in the northwest part of Europe. The country is comprised of 2 major parts: Republic of Ireland (70,282 sqm) and Northern Ireland (14,139 sqm). There are 5 principal urban areas, namely: Greater Dublin Area, Cork, Limerick, Galway, and Waterford.

#### Demographics

Majority (88%) of the population are Roman Catholic. The total population as of April 2005 exceeded 4 million. More than one-third of the population (1.48 million) is aged from birth to 24 years old (21% aged 0-14 years old, 16% aged 15 to 24 years old).

#### Economy

The country is considered as one of the fastest growing economy in Europe with gross domestic product recorded to have doubled in the past 10 years.

GDP (2004) was US\$ 126.4 billion. Per capita was US\$ 31,900.

A few decades ago, Ireland was engaged more in agriculture and traditional manufacturing. The economy now is primarily into technology and international services, in which majority of employment is also in services (66%) and industry (28%), with agriculture as the lowest (6%).

#### Language

The official language of the country is Irish. Though English is considered as a second language, it is the language of the majority of the population.

#### Educational System

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment provides the prescribed curriculum. Education is compulsory from age 6 to 16 years.

The educational levels are divided into primary (first-level), post-primary (second-level), and third level. Post primary includes secondary, vocational, community, and comprehensive schools. Third level sector involves schooling in universities, technology, and college of education. Post Leaving Certificate courses are considered as "further education," taken after second-level schooling, but is not a part of the third-level system.

Students in the primary level are typically between the ages 4 to 11 years old while those in the post-primary level are aged 12 to 18 years old. The post-primary level is divided into junior cycle (12 to 14 years old) and senior cycle (15 to 18 years old).

The senior cycle involves two programs: Transition Year and Leaving Certificate. After finishing junior cycle, majority of the students undergo Transition Year programme geared in enhancing student maturity through academic-, work-, entrepreneurial-, and community- related activities. The Leaving Certificate programme is the main option in the senior cycle which lasts for 2 years.

There are 2 major state examinations: Junior Certificate examination is given to those who completed the 3 years junior cycle and Established Leaving Certificate examination at the end of the senior cycle.

**Problems Encountered:**

There are approximately 13,000 students who leave school each year without having taken the Leaving Certificate examination (senior cycle aged 15 to 18 years). Of this estimate, 2,400 leave before Junior Certificate examination (junior cycle aged 12 to 14 years). By age 17, there are only 83% who continue schooling.

## **2. History and current status of school psychology**

### **Historical Timeline and School Psychology**

Local psychological services has grown in the 1960s due to recognition of schools catering to students with special needs. These schools were dominantly established by religious orders and community organizations and have provisions for psychological services. These services were also extended to mainstream students. At that same period, the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee also established the first school psychological services for mainstream schools (e.g. community colleges, vocational schools, secondary level).

In 1965, the Department (Ministry) of Education- Psychological Service was established to assist schools, specifically in developing standardized tests and in research. The psychologist- to -pupil ratio was approximately 1 to 20,000. Due to the absence of comprehensive psychological services in schools, clinical psychologists employed in the regional health service provided these services, especially to those students with special educational needs.

In mid-1990, psychological services for primary schools were established.

In 1992 Psychological Support Service provided services to second-level schools.

In 1999, the National Educational Psychological Service under the Department of Education was established.

In 2001, the Department of Education commissioned psychological services for those schools with limited access to these services. There were 158 psychologists in private practice who provided services to schools.

In 2005, there were 128 employed psychologists under National Educational Psychological Service who provide psychological services to schools in different regions.

## **3. Infrastructure of school psychology**

### **National & Regional Professional Organizations**

National Educational Psychological Service  
Psychological Society of Ireland

City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee  
City of Dublin Vocational Education Psychological Service

**Laws or other regulations regarding licensure of psychologists and school psychologists**

At this point there is no statutory protection for “psychologist.”

**Professional journals and newsletters relied on by school psychologists**

Ireland Based: Irish Journal of Psychology, Irish Psychologist

United Kingdom: Support for Learning, Educational Psychology in Practice, The British Journal of Educational Psychology, The Journal of Child Psychiatry and Psychology

**4. Preparation of school psychologists**

There are 2 postgraduate training programmes in educational psychology

Diploma in Professional (Educational) Psychology offered by Psychological Society of Ireland

Master of Arts in Educational Psychology offered by University College Dublin and accredited by the Psychological Society of Ireland

**Diploma in Professional (Educational) Psychology offered by Psychological Society of Ireland  
Core curriculum**

a) Scope of Training (Knowledge & Skill Areas)

Knowledge Areas: cognitive development and learning, physical, emotional, and social development, education systems, professional and interprofessional issues, and education for special needs

Skill Areas: teaching and school experience, assessment and reporting, skills and strategies for intervention, consultation and training, and research and evaluation

b) Years of Study

3 to 4 years

c) Training Programs and Requirements

120 days placement in psychological services

Dissertation

Pass 4 examinations

Reports on casework and interventions (varied clients)

School placement required for those without teaching qualifications

Approximately 14 trainees per year

d) Where Graduates are Typically Employed

Government, schools, private practice

**Master of Arts in Educational Psychology offered by University College Dublin and accredited by the Psychological Society of Ireland**

a) Scope of Training (Knowledge & Skill Areas)

Domains of Knowledge:

Foundation subjects: educational psychology, developmental psychology, social psychology, social policy, special education needs provision and legislation, occupational psychology, and counseling psychology

Knowledge of educational needs/disabilities and aetiology assessment and intervention

Nature of psychological interventions such as individualized planning, and systematic and consultative interventions

Requisite skills for psychological interventions such as psychometric assessment, report writing, counseling and communication skills, and professional and ethical issues

Research methodologies and statistical analysis

- b) Years of Study  
2 years  
Year 2 entry (for qualified teachers)
- c) Training Programs and Requirements  
80 days of professional placement  
Dissertation  
Approximately 12 trainees per year
- d) Where Graduates are Typically Employed  
Government, schools, private practice



## 5. Roles, functions, and responsibilities of school psychologists

The title for school psychologist is educational psychologist or psychologist. Services to schools involve consultation and advice, training, and working with individual students.

National Educational Service model of service prescribes consultation as central in individual student consultation and casework, support and development (systems-level consultation), and in preventive and intervention activities. A ratio of one psychologist to 20 schools (both primary and post-primary). Variation depends on the school size and profile.

Advisory and support functions are also performed to the minister of education and school administrations (e.g. special education issues, critical incidence affecting schools, diagnostic assessment: learning disabilities).

### Instruments Used

IQ: Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children, Wechsler Individual Achievement Test-UK, British Ability Scales

Socio-emotional-behavioral: Conners rating Scales and Child Behavior checklist

## 6. Current practice impacting school psychologists

## School Psychology India

The distinct and crucial role of an educational psychologist are yet to be established. Some of the pressing concerns encountered involve the government policy on inclusion and in addressing the needs of students who have difficulty in English (as an additional language). The challenge is to be able to address the needs of all students, with varied difficulties, special or otherwise. Moreover, there are just few schools who receive a comprehensive school psychology services.

The Irish government had made provisions to address educational needs of students and in acknowledging the role of educational psychologists (e.g. Health and Care Professionals Bill, Educational Welfare Act 2000, Education Act, Education for Persons With Special Educational Needs Act, National Council for Special Education).

