

Case Study on Stakeholder Engagement – Cavan Institute & Southern Regional College, Newry

What Cavan Institute learnt from new NEFHEA partner, Southern Regional College, Newry

The North East Further and Higher Education Alliance (NEFHEA) was formed in 2007 with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT), Cavan Institute, Monaghan Institute, O’Fiaich College, Drogheda Institute of Further Education, Dunboyne Institute of Further Education and Beaufort College.

The purpose of the alliance was to enhance progression opportunities for students from further to higher education, to promote collegiality among staff of the member colleges and the sharing of expertise, and to collaborate on responding to regional and local industry needs through the design and delivery of innovative courses.

In October 2018, the alliance extended its membership, welcoming Southern Regional College (SRC), Newry, as the first Northern Ireland partner, and enhanced the scope for students to progress their studies on a cross-border basis.

DkIT hosted a symposium in March 2019 to highlight the increased opportunities for collaboration in higher education. Titled “A Changing Cross-Border Landscape for Further and Higher Education”, more than 80 policy makers, academics and industry representatives attended the event. Brian Doran, CEO of Southern Regional College was joined by Finola Keogh, Director of Lifelong Learning at Cavan Institute on a discussion panel, together with representatives from other NEFHEA member colleges.

This was an ideal opportunity for Cavan Institute to develop a closer relationship with new NEFHEA member, SRC. An invitation was issued to SRC to visit Cavan Institute and a delegation from SRC visit Cavan in May of that year, where they were welcomed by the Chief Executive of Cavan and Monaghan Education and Training Board, John Kearney, Director of Cavan Institute, Ann Marie Lacey, and other members of the senior management team at the Institute. This meeting formed the basis for identifying issues of common interest and a follow-up visit by the Cavan team to SRC was arranged.

The team from Cavan Institute comprising its director, deputy directors, director of lifelong learning and other colleagues visited SRC in October 2019. They were greeted by Brian Doran, CEO, Raymond Sloan, Director of Client Services, Keith Kilpatrick, Director of Curriculum, David Vint, Assistant Director of Community, Schools Partnership Provision (SPP) and external funding, Fiona Bradley, Assistant Director of Further Education and Training, Carolyn Davisin, Assistant Director of Higher Education and Quality, and Tracy Rice, Head of Business Engagement.

A hugely productive day was spent with the team from SRC examining such issues as funding models, programme delivery structures, building projects, curriculum and staffing at the college. A tour of the Newry campus also provided the team from Cavan with a clear vision of how integrated delivery of further and higher education can be delivered, the services and facilities essential to serve the students and staff at this progressive college, and the ways in which a range of apprenticeships are being resourced, delivered and promoted. Discussions with counterparts in SRC have facilitated and/or stimulated a number of actions in the time since the visits, including:

- At the time of visiting the SRC campus, Cavan Institute was in the planning stage for the development of a state-of-the-art Kitchen and adjoining training restaurant facility to support the delivery of the National Commi-Chef apprenticeship programme. SRC had developed a similar facility some years ago. This provided an opportunity to undertake a critical evaluation of our project, in light of their considered feedback, on what has and has not worked well in the time since this project was completed. Amendments to the design and layout were implemented based on the input of SRC subject matter experts in this area.
- Discussion at the initial SRC visit to Cavan Institute demonstrated that we both shared mutual concerns around the increasing number of students who were presenting at both colleges requiring mental health supports. The site visit to SRC focused on this issue in some detail and the team provided detail on a service procured by SRC from an external agency to provide a 24/7 support line for students. On return, Cavan Institute examined whether this was feasible within its context and this service has now been introduced for students across all programmes.
- Collaborative learning spaces, project rooms and cross curricular, problem-based learning spaces in SRC were viewed by CI staff during the site visit. These spaces have provided inspiration to the CI team in planning for the layout of new CI modular units at the FET Campus to replace older buildings from which teaching and learning currently takes place. These modular units are likely to be in use by teachers and students during 2021.
- An exploration of TEL tools that are used in classroom spaces in SRC, in particular in engineering discipline area, formed part of the visit to SRC, as well as discussion on the levels of funding that were required to implement some of these technologies. Since this visit, CI have since prioritised the upgrading of TEL facilities and are currently working with teaching staff and members of the Teaching and Learning Committee to design and resource these spaces.

Crucially, the visits by teams from both colleges to our respective campuses have allowed us to form a relationship which will last long into the future, from which we can all derive mutual benefit and learning. And from the perspective of Cavan Institute, our visit to SRC has enabled us to plan and project how we would like our college to evolve into an

integrated hub of learning, delivering both further and higher education programmes, together the wide range of services and supports necessary to become a *FET College of the Future*, serving the needs of learners, the community and industry in the region.



Southern Regional College visit Cavan Institute in May 2019

L-R: Maggie Grant, SRC, Brian Doran, SRC, Ann Marie Lacey, Cavan Institute, Evin O'Meara, Cavan Institute, Karen Fitzpatrick, Cavan Institute, Keith Kilpatrick, SRC, Gerard McKenny, Cavan Institute, John Kearney, CMETB, Finola Keogh, Cavan Institute

