

Reflecting Together – Learning from the arrival of Ukrainian children into schools in Youghal

Tuesday 28 February 2023

Participating Schools:

- Pobalscoil na Trionóide
- South Abbey National School
- Bunscoil Mhuire

This conversation-based event was designed to enable members of the local school community (students, teachers, parents and other stakeholders) to share experiences and learnings from the arrival of Ukrainian children into Irish schools.

Twenty-three Ukrainian students, together with twelve school staff and parents, attended the event which was held in the Mall Arts Centre in Youghal. Participants came from three local schools, Pobalscoil na Trionóide (post primary), South Abbey National School and Bunscoil Mhuire (both primary) and were joined by seven observers from relevant local and national organisations (Department of Education, Teaching Council, NCSE, Tusla Education Welfare, REALT – Cork ETB and the Quality Hotel, Youghal).

This event was part of a pilot study project supported by the European Commission's DG Structural Reform Support Programme, in collaboration with the Teaching Council, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and a range of education stakeholders in Ireland. The aim of the overall project being to uncover ways in which local community engagement can contribute meaningfully to national education policy development in Ireland.

The event was facilitated by Chris Chapman, Martin Hawkes and Máirín Ní Chéilleachair on behalf of [Burren College of Art](#), with evaluation being undertaken by the [Centre for Effective Services](#). The event built on the [BEACONS](#) model of participatory engagement developed by the Teaching Council. The organising of this event was supported by the Department of Education. Local organisation was undertaken by Karen Casey, REALT Co-ordinator with Cork ETB. Written materials were translated into Ukrainian by Lyudmila Fedyshyna, a member of staff at Bunscoil Mhuire.



Funded by
the European Union

An Chomhairle
Mhúinteoireachta
The Teaching Council



BURREN COLLEGE OF ART



An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education



The Centre
for Effective
Services

Summary of Key Themes

Basic human needs

A lot of the day focused on ordinary human needs, such as needs for stability, belonging, friendship and wanting to be understood. There was a lot of gratitude for the care that had been shown.

Transitions

Transitions were a particular source of anxiety and a particular place where additional support (including language support) was needed.

The impact of stress/trauma

People had been through traumatic experiences and were particularly worried about the possibility of being moved again.

Integration

There was a wish for the curriculum to be delivered in ways that facilitated integration – also for greater emphasis to be put on access to integrated social activities.

Straddling two education systems

Many students were studying the Ukrainian curriculum online, as well as following the Irish curriculum in school. This was potentially overwhelming and left little time for social activities.

Supports needed

Issues were identified in relation to a wide range of services eg. Home School Liaison, NEPS, CAMHS, Transport, SNA's, Guidance, Language etc etc.

Learning from experience

It was felt that schools had performed remarkably in difficult circumstances. The suggested way forward now was to maximise the potential for local decision-making and the sharing of resources. It was also suggested that inspections should be adapted to reflect the changed circumstances.

Language needs

There was a desire for more help with English and questions about the necessity of learning Irish.

Structure of Event

The event was structured around a sequence of conversations, as follows:

- A. One word we'd like to be in the conversation today
- B. What we'd like others to understand of our experience in education in the last year
- C. Identifying conversation topics that we'd like to explore further
- D. What has surprised you so far and what are you curious about now?
- E. How can we improve things within and between schools and in the wider system?
- F. Final comments

The sections of report that follow describe the outputs from each of the conversations.

A. One word we'd like to be in the conversation today

Participants were invited to write one word on a card that they would like to be in the conversation.

Responses were grouped into themes, as follows.

Wellbeing & Friendship

Friendship
Content
Wellbeing
Happy
Better
Fun
Happy

Community & Relationships

Community
shared responsibility
integration
Community
connections
Ukrainian relationship with Irish students
sharing
connections

Being Understood

Listened to
Understanding
Listening and understanding

Need for Stability

Stability
support
help
Be sure of the future
Residence
because our future is blurry, so afraid to move again - we love our school

Identity & Language

English
English language
Ukrainian
Ukrainian language in 2024!
about Ukraine
about Ukrainian people
about Ukraine

Possibilities

Self-development
Extra activities
Diversified development
New Experience
Gadgets for exams
Enriching
Incredible
Excited

Other

Teamwork
Time
Good people in Ireland
Useful things to talk about

B. What we'd like others to understand of our experience in education last year

This discussion was held in small groups. Responses have been grouped according to principal themes.

Stress & Stressors

Initial Anxiety

At the start we were scared, stressed, sad, excited

bad weather was a shock

we were disappointed to leave family friends behind in Ukraine

we were worried about making new friends and losing old hobbies, soccer, sport etc.

Continuing anxiety/trauma

the last year has been difficult

many good and bad moments

it took 4 months to settle

stressful

worried

war

many fathers and families in Ukraine

every day worrying about home and family

traumatic; longing for loved ones

longing for dad and friends from Ukraine

unrest

unrest

always worry about family in Ukraine every day

Adapting to change

Maths curriculum taught differently

Weather is hard to adapt to in Ireland

When I go to Ireland it is very different and hard in school

boring at times

time and patience were needed

the year was very difficult

my English was weak, now it is stronger

after-school activities are difficult to continue, we lost our hobbies and skills

Burden of staying abreast of two systems

Pupils attending both Irish and Ukrainian schools

huge workloads

it is difficult to study in 2 schools (Ukrainian and Irish)

school activities are difficult to continue, we lost our hobbies and skills

Need stability

Need stability so that we don't worry about moving and changing school

moving accommodation is distressing and hard to find new school

Supports needed

Increased supports needed in schools - teachers/SNA's/liaison

concern that not all children are attending school

Home School Community Liaison needed in schools

bus escorts needed

Transport issues

lack of services across all areas

medical/counselling/schooling

lack of support for centre managers

what supports are there?

I need more subjects for my choice for 5th class

Access to outdoor play areas/activities

Cost of 3rd Level

Cost of college is very high

Language Challenges

Learning English – challenge and opportunity

Language barrier

language difficulties

teens accent is very difficult, but teachers are OK, so we can understand the teachers

I improved my English after 1 year and now I understand much more than I did when I came here!

new language

new language

before I came to Ireland I can't speak any English, but I go to school and meet so many nice people, they really help me

before we were worried about learning English, now we are able to learn English

EAL: more time for English language development, sentence structure, better to know English

Inappropriate class

I came to Ireland in June. The first time I had a problem with studying English language. Because of this I joined 2nd year in school. But I very quickly study it, because I think I start to speak with people who only speak English language. And then I understand that studying the programme in 2nd years is too easy for me so I want to join 5th year - but I was too young to do so. The DP told me "If you want to go to another class you can try Transition Year" - I applied for this

Translation assistance

Dictionaries for exams

devices to translate and make the educational process easier

Ukrainian as subject

Ukrainian as a post-primary leaving certificate subject

please add Ukrainian as a subject to take exams!

Irish as core subject

Irish as core subject: must study Irish

Cultural awareness

Maintaining cultural awareness

New Context - welcome/support/ friendship

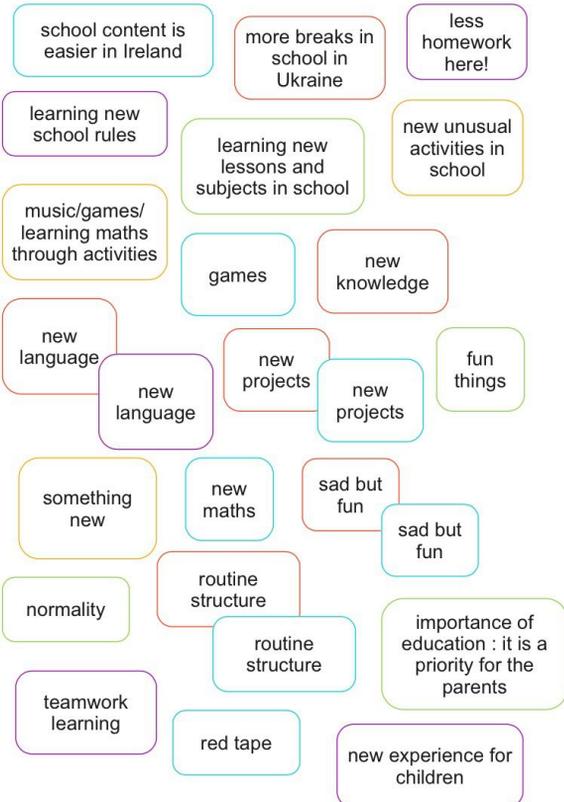
New friends



Support



New regime and structure



Miscellaneous

Emotions and feelings



Youghal

Location is nice in Youghal by the sea
beautiful country

Other

much information, knowledge, knowledge, knowledge, knowledge, communication, communication, understanding

Gratitude

Ireland gives protection for me and my family, it gives me a lesson about what is really important
good people
Irish people are supportive/friendly
Thank you Ireland for good people

Additional comments from plenary discussion

Ukrainian Language

Please add Ukrainian language as an exam subject

Response from DoE: This is planned from 2025

3rd Level Costs

Cost in university/3rd level are very high

Response from DoE: DFHERIS is aware of those issues and they will be addressed

Being Moved

Students don't want to have to worry about changing schools if their place of abode is changed

it is hugely stressful to have to find a new school if moved to a new location, can take up to two months

We need to be aware how stressed the children were on arrival with insufficient support facilities

it took four months to settle

There's a real fear of being moved

Need for better Organisation

While not wishing to be critical of the DoE, its initial response was disjointed with families being 'dumped' in Youghal without support. The local schools took control. Now things are much better. We need to learn from the experience. There should be a district inspector coordinating with new teachers and SNA's being transferred in.

the DoE and the ETB/Réalt were very positive and supportive even if they didn't have all the answers. Having translators - Ukrainian with English - in the mix was miraculous.

There was a shared sense of responsibility to do our best. While there were a lot of challenges, Youghal was exceptional with collegiality of schools coming together

Youghal is different to other places. A Ukrainian said that books and uniforms were all provided and the schools cared for the students.

Ukrainian + Irish Curricula

Between a third and a half of students are doing Ukrainian school in the evening on top of Irish school during the day which is a big work load. Students should be in school five days a week and while there is the option of doing the Ukrainian curriculum, this should be done after normal school with, however, the danger of being over-burdened. It also raises the issue of socialisation.

Leaving Cert

Those close to completion in the Ukrainian system couldn't do the Leaving Cert. We are trying to devise a curriculum to suit them.

C. Identifying conversation topics that we'd like to explore further

Six topics were chosen that participants wanted to discuss and explore further. At the end of the conversations on each topic, participants were asked the additional question 'What needs to happen next?'

The six topics were:

1. Comparing Ukrainian and Irish Schools
2. Extra English
3. Short-term issues for students in Senior Cycle
4. Online Education - choices and challenges
5. Supports available
6. How to Encourage Integration - One Year On

1. Comparing Ukrainian and Irish Schools

| | Ireland | Ukraine |
|--|--|---|
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8.40-9.20am start • 2-3.30pm finish | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8-9am start • 3-4pm finish • In larger schools, older classes from 12-6pm |
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No break between lessons except two longer breaks | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 lesson = 45 minutes • 1 x 5/10 minute break between every lesson • 1 x 20 minute break |
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No running in the yard | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can run and play indoors |
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can use iPads in school | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No iPads |
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Irish difficult | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maths and Science more difficult |
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More respect for students | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less respect for students |
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less homework | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hours of homework |
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Younger, fun, kind teachers • More male teachers • Smaller class size • More fun activities, not just serious lessons (cooking, fancy dress) • No phones allowed | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different teachers per subject • Move from classroom to classroom • Learn Russian/Ukrainian/German/English at Primary School • Canteen for lunch (hot meals) |

a better format

1. Comparing Ukrainian and Irish Schools contd.

What needs to happen next?

- Maths and Science lessons more challenging
- Irish lessons with all Ukrainian students – all learning at the same level and pace
- More English (EAL) lessons
- Allowed to use phone to translate in class

(Nb. Older students are asking 'why do I have to learn Irish?')

2. Extra English

What needs to happen next?

We need extra English because it is very important. In this year, we will finish Primary School and must come to secondary school and new subjects. We need to organize an additional lesson at school with the participation of a Ukrainian teacher

Language barriers are preventing children from experiencing success (as they used to)

3. Short-term issues for students in Senior Cycle

- Could there be some language support in Universities?
- If we leave school for college after 5th year, are we able to return to school?
- What scholarship/accommodation/grant supports will be available?

What needs to happen next?

- Support with taking decisions about whether to complete the leaving certificate next year or enter University in 2023
-

4. Online Education

(Nb. Some students are doing Ukrainian school online at the end of their day in Irish school)

- Doing Ukrainian school is important to be prepared for when they return
- There are no breaks between classes – no food
- Classes in Ireland are more creative
- There is more group work in Ireland vs. individual style in Ukraine – challenge is to get balance correct
- Particularly difficult for Primary children, as they have no free classes where they can do online Ukrainian education
- Children can spend up to four hours doing homework for Ukrainian and Irish schools
- Need for more supports on the ground in schools
- Need for additional activities/clubs after school for children

4. Online Education contd.

What needs to happen next?

- More clarification for parents and students from the Department of Education in terms of online education

5. Supports Available

- Accommodations for SC/LC
- After school clubs and activities
- Increased career guidance at Post Primary
- Further support needed around guidance and counselling to allow students and staff to deal with trauma
- Bus escorts needed to support bus full of children with language translation
- Increased hours of HSCL, NEPS and CAMHS supports needed
- Abolition of EAL Cap
- Further increase in population to come
- Priority needs to be given to care and wellbeing
- Proximity to schools and services is vital

What needs to happen next?

- A Review of supports for schools
- Co-ordination of all stakeholders at local + regional level to identify and solve challenges

6. How to Encourage Integration – One Year On

Top Priorities

- Communication with classmates
- How to learn Ukrainian in Primary Schools
- Importance of having Ukrainian teachers/SNA's in our schools

Specific Ideas

- More English classes for pupils and parents
- Ukrainian for Irish pupils
- Take part in local activities (GAA/Soccer/Dancing)
- Take part in school activities (music) – things to help make friends
- (It was a whirlwind at the start – now is the time to take an honest look at what to do now)
- We need to take a fresh look at how we refer to our children. No longer any need to distinguish between Ukrainian and Irish pupils
- Encourage more parental involvement in school life
- Home-School Liaison person to provide a link
- We need continuous support of Ukrainian staff in our schools
- We need flexibility of expectations of curriculum delivery (need to get Inspectorate on board)
- We need NEPS to offer psychological support in social group settings

6. How to Encourage Integration – One Year On contd.

What needs to happen next?

- Stop being strangers through being involved in social life here – essential actually for adults and children

Additional comments from plenary discussion

Comparing Ukrainian and Irish Schools

- Ireland is more fun and teachers are more respectful
- Irish system is more holistic and there is less homework
- Would like more challenge in science and maths
- Burden of covering both Irish and Ukrainian curricula at the same time
- Would like phones to facilitate translation
- Why do I have to learn Irish?

Extra English

It is very important to have additional lessons

Short-term Senior Cycle

Why not have scholarships? - Which is better, staying in the Irish school system or relying on the quality of the Ukrainian system?

Online Education – choices and challenges

Parents are pressing their children to be online for Ukrainian classes at 5/6pm. We need more clarity around the relative merits of this vs. focusing on Irish education

Support available

After-school clubs - homework + other activities which all children need - Could all stakeholders reflect on what works and what doesn't work?

Integration

- Make integration the focus of learning so that all are aware of it
- Language is a barrier
- Take part in GAA/music - be involved
- Take an honest look at what we need to do now
- No need to differentiate and draw attention to Ukrainian vs. Irish children
- Encourage parents to be involved
- Need home-school liaison person and the position shouldn't be threatened by a numbers criterion as the role is critical even with small numbers
- Think of inclusion in curriculum delivery
- Have psychological supports for children for whom the situation is really hard
- Be flexible and reduce expectations on staff - get the inspectorate on board

D. What has surprised you so far and what are we curious about now?

Different groups saying similar things

We're all the same, Irish and Ukrainian

The importance of education - how can we do it better?

What can we accomplish together? Some are afraid of responsibility

Today feels like a good way to start the conversation

Those on the ground need to be given the power to make changes

The Department of Education do understand

E. How can we improve things within and between schools and in the wider system?

Small school-based groups worked with a template to look at the potential to improve things:

- a) at a school level
- b) by working together differently and
- c) by national agencies doing something different

Responses have been grouped together in the following table.

E. How can we improve things

| In our school | By Working Together Differently | By National Agencies Doing Something Different |
|--|--|--|
| <p>Review, Reflect, Improve (tying into School Self Evaluation and LAOS - Looking at Our School)</p> <p>Organise hobby clubs, e.g. dancing, table tennis, volleyball etc bringing Irish and Ukrainian pupils together - more opportunities for social interaction and making friends (fun activities)</p> <p>More games-based english learning More opportunities for talking More reading More project work More challenging Maths and Science lessons / experiences Play-based learning</p> <p>“In all the schools, please let us use devices for translation during LC exams”</p> <p>Allowed to use their phone in class</p> <p>Regularly move seat to encourage the development of more friendships</p> <p>Ukrainian pupils have own Gaeilge lessons</p> | <p>Clusters - Schools sharing knowledge, maybe psychological supports + specialisms, maybe even HSCL resources</p> <p>Taking an honest look at what we do now</p> <p>Take part in local activities for adults and children</p> <p>Working with different classes and teachers</p> <p>Extra help and support in education and wellbeing (providing devices for students + organising extra activities)</p> <p>HSCL (or similar) will form a bridge between home and school + would support education attendance and positive relationships</p> <p>Remove unnecessary hurdles within outdated policies + procedures</p> <p>Translate the exam papers into Ukrainian</p> <p>Parents Councils / Associations to include parents from Ukraine</p> <p>Student Voice and Students Councils to include students from Ukraine</p> | <p>All stakeholders to be consulted</p> <p>Review what has happened since Day One learn from challenges faced + how those challenges were overcome + possible solutions to ongoing challenges</p> <p>Remove threat of losing teachers / SNA's if numbers drop</p> <p>Additional resources from NCSE</p> <p>SEC to update schools ASAP re state exams</p> <p>School transport needs to answer queries from Centre / parents / REALT - school transport need to address issues where no routes available - bus escorts are needed on some routes</p> <p>EAL cap to be reviewed - “We need additional Irish and English”</p> <p>Ukrainian language into curriculum - books in Ukrainian for children</p> <p>More flexibility of expectations from School Inspectors</p> |

E. How can we improve things contd.

| In our school | By Working Together Differently | By National Agencies Doing Something Different |
|---|---|--|
| <p>Have a playground More breaks No Homework!! More lunch !! More PE !! More time outside !! Sweets for lunch !! Use phones on break !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!</p> <p>Longer Break !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!</p> <p>Encourage more parental involvement in school life Encourage better attendance More English classes for pupils and parents A welcome Pack listing resources and after school clubs (translated into Ukrainian)</p> | <p>More subject choice for LC</p> <p>We need time in the system</p> <p>No longer distinguish between Irish and Ukrainian pupils</p> | <p>Tusla involvement</p> <p>SNA for students + psychological supports - more NEPS support for students and parents</p> <p>Home School Liaison provision</p> <p>Providing a bus link to bring people into town</p> <p>Career guidance allocation needs to be increased</p> <p>Assurances needed that accommodation will be permanent</p> <p>Grants for Higher Education</p> |

E. How can we improve things contd.

Additional comments from plenary discussion

Within Schools

Have play-groups - more PE - break down barriers

Let us use devices - use of phones

Clubs can help integration

Social interaction - phones in class

More creative involvement

Schools Working Together Differently

Cluster schools share knowledge

System to facilitate working together + time

Don't differentiate between Irish and Ukrainian

Extra help with wellbeing

Translation into Ukrainian

Home-school liaison support

National Agencies Doing Things Differently

Ukrainian language SNA's and psychological support

3rd Level Grants recognising addition of English and Irish subjects

Career guidance re. 3rd level

Remove the threat that you will lose a teacher or supports if numbers fall

Buses

F. Final Comments

As a Ukrainian teacher I am very grateful for today and for the constant help in the darkest days of our lives

This is very important for us – thank you so much

As an Irish school principal the Ukrainians have changed and enriched our lives and opened our perspectives to the world outside our bubble; it's not so long ago since our people were dispersed to foreign countries. We can feel part of Europe vs. an offshore island. If we were in their shoes we would some kind welcoming hosts. Despite the housing and other crises this makes us realise how lucky we are – it's a joy to be able to help. The parents and students are lovely

From an official perspective I am here today in listening mode. We have tried to put structures in place. We are striving to bring what is invisible to light and today has been invaluable to us. Ireland is a better place for having Ukrainians here

From a Realt perspective, it's great to be heard. I enjoyed the personal engagement. Thanks for today and I know our voices will be heard and will help bring about change