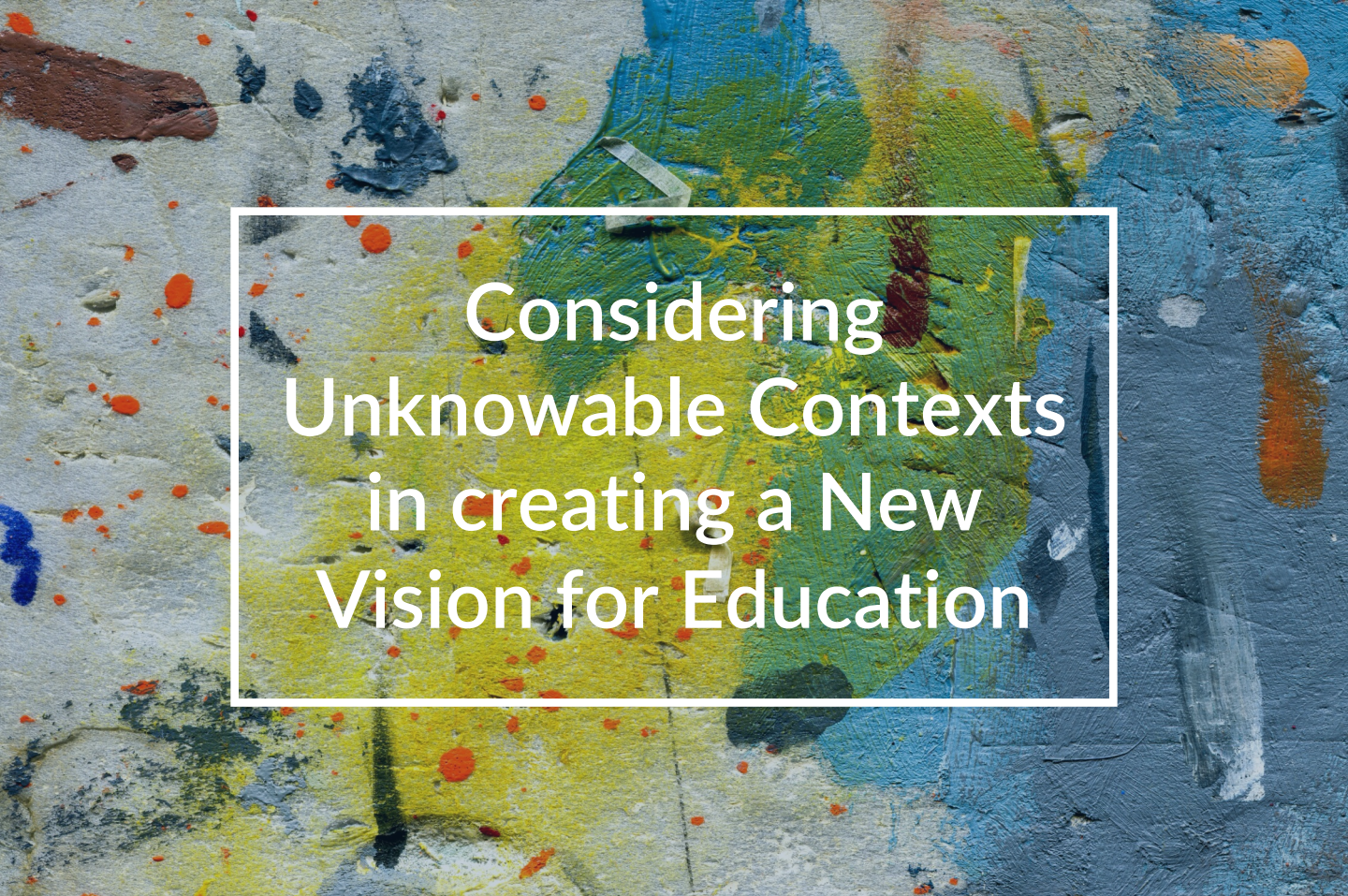




Considering Unknowable Contexts in creating a New Vision for Education

REPORT OF AN ONLINE EVENT
Organised by Burren College of Art
on 19 June 2026

Struck by the
quality of
knowledge of the
group

A human-centred
education based
on core Irish love
for fun and
community

Prepared to have
those difficult
conversations ...
lovely, restorative
conversations

Need for more of
that “gaiety
transfiguring all
that dread” (Yeats)

Foreword

Burren College of Art initiated this event to begin to explore possible responses to some of the limitations in the habitual ways that we tend to look at the future, particularly when we are planning for the future of Education (although, similar points could be made about other areas too).

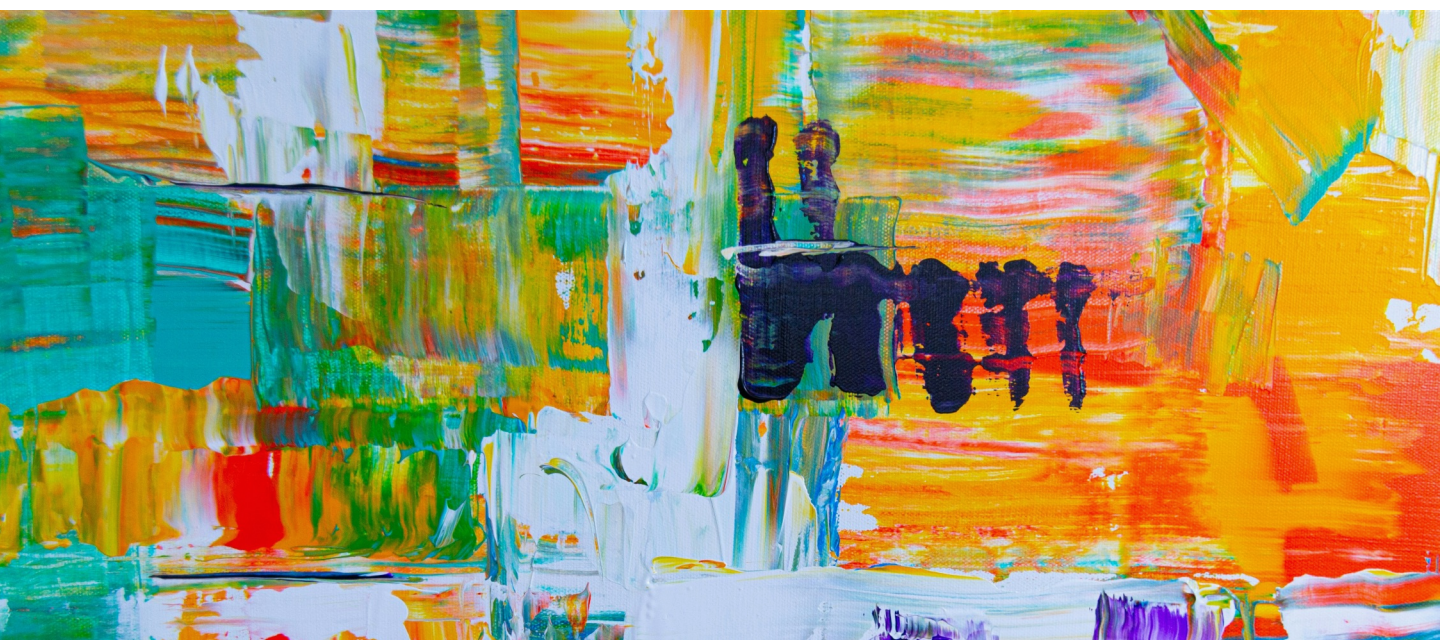
(Our use of 'we' here is deliberate to include all of us who think about the future of Education. In many discussions, there is a tendency for things to be talked about in terms of 'us' and 'them', as if 'they' are the problem and 'we' know what 'they' should do. We try to avoid that tendency here and recognise a bigger 'Us', which includes all of 'us' - 'We' are all part of a culture that tends to approach things in certain ways and those ways of approaching things tend to get us into certain types of problems. We want to help to start to shed more light on these ways, their consequences and possible ways forward)

We went through a few iterations of possible titles for this event, before arriving at "Considering Unknowable Contexts

...". We feel this captures something significant that challenges the dominant (habitual) ways that 'planning' tends to get done. The usual idea is that we develop a 'Vision' and then we work out a 'Plan' for getting from 'here to there'. But, there are some problems with this, e.g.

- Our 'Vision' tends to be based on current realities, not what might be possible
- Some voices tend to get heard more than others. Some people tend not to be 'in the room' at all.
- We make unconscious, unexplored assumptions. By their nature, we don't know our blind spots.
- We have difficulties working with complexity and unpredictability.
- We have things we are uncomfortable or scared to talk about.
- We have collective habits that limit our capacity to do change.
- Etc etc

We did not expect to sort this all out in a two hour online event, but we thought we could make a start ...



Structure of Event

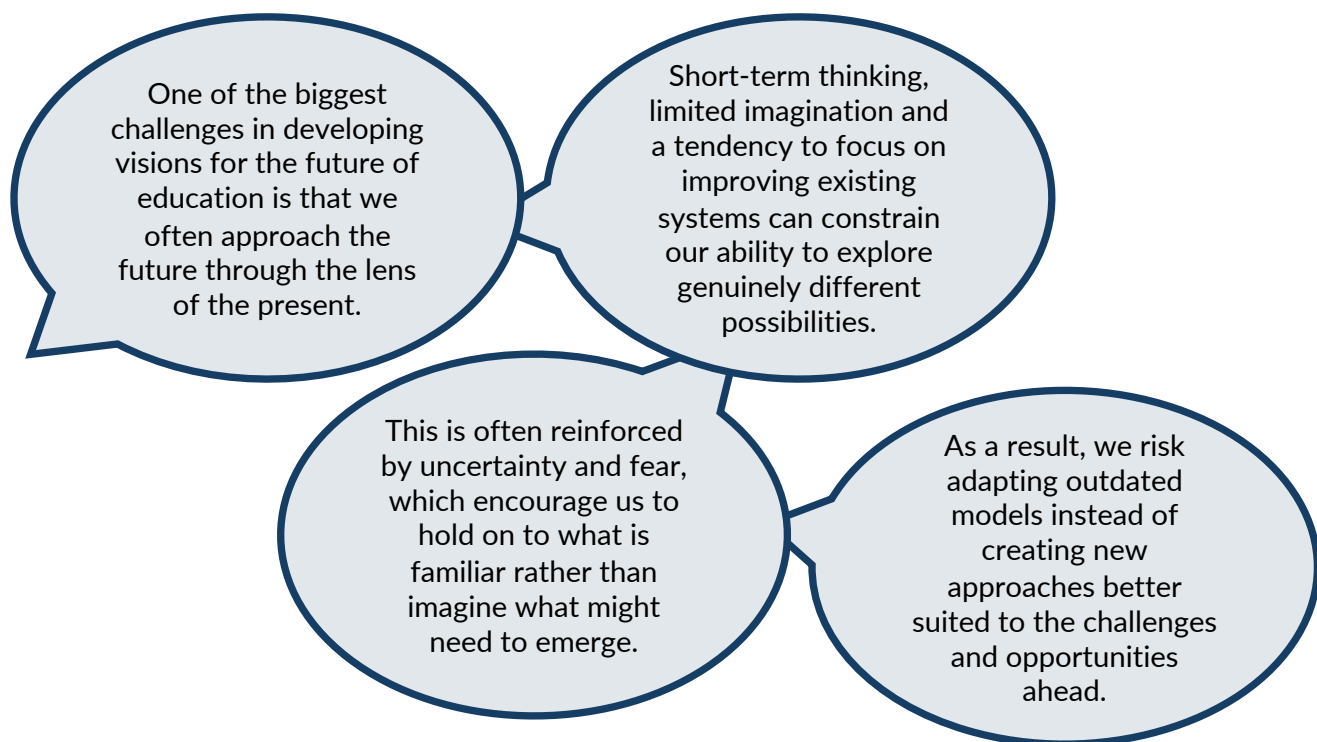
Thirty people came together online for two hours. We explored our different perceptions of 'the problem(s)' and why we have these problems and then we worked in breakout groups to explore particular scenarios that we thought should be taken into account more and the implications of those for planning in education. Finally, in plenary, we came to some tentative conclusions.

The thirty people were a diverse mix of academics (including people from relevant

areas other than education, such as business and sustainability), people from within the education system (principals, teachers and people who work in policy development etc) and people who seek to work with the education system (social entrepreneurs, artists etc).

This report picks out some of the main points made in the event. (Direct quotes from participants are in speech bubbles)

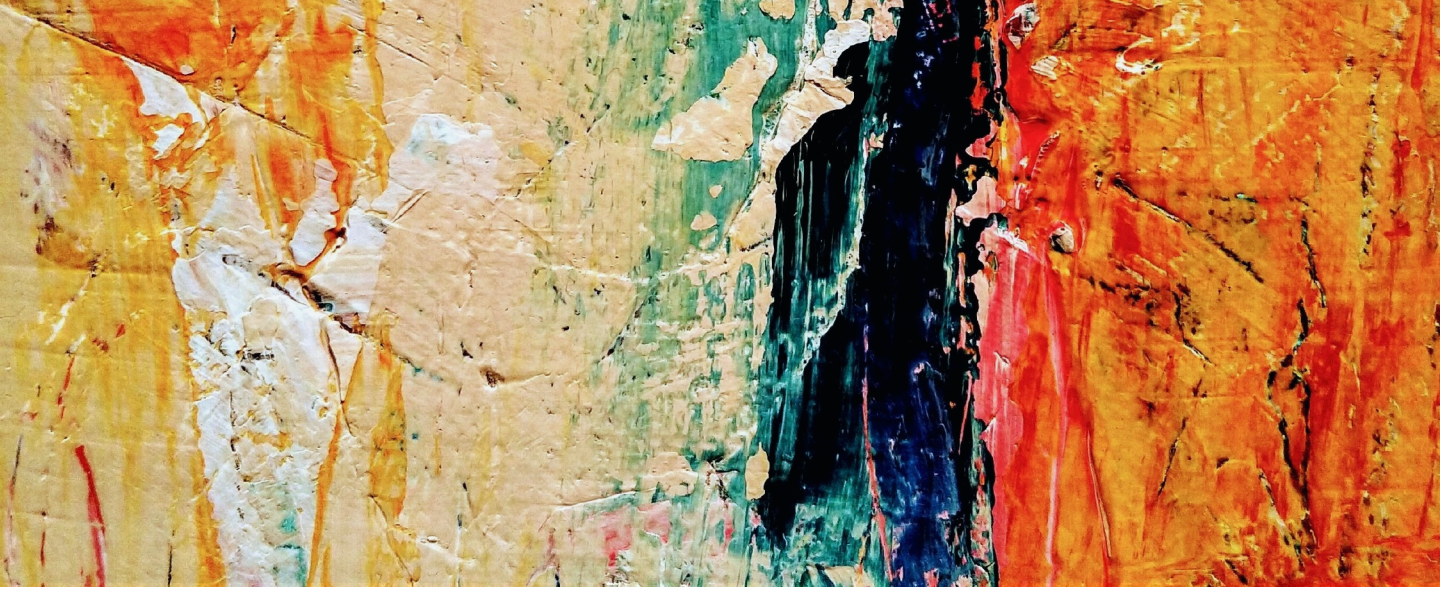
Limitations in how we look at the future



Problems highlighted by participants

- Looking through the lens of the present (our current assumptions and what we see as 'normal') - we miss our blind spots
- Being overwhelmed by the pace and quantity of change - we survive by over-focussing on the short-term and a limited range of possibilities
- Being frozen by our fears, including a fear of the unknown - we hold on to what is familiar - tweaking rather than transforming
- We struggle to break free and imagine and articulate different possible futures
- We miss the potential possibilities that could come from considering wider questions





Some of the wider / deeper questions relating to unknowable contexts that came up in our discussions:

- What is education for ?
- If the diversity and quantity of additional needs (and medication) continues to increase, what is an appropriate model of education ?
- How will generative AI affect the younger generation ? What is the role of education in responding to those effects ?
- What might our communities be like in the future ? What is the role of education in relation to the kind of communities we want to have ?
- What is an appropriate mix of competition and collaboration in preparation for unknowable futures ?
- How can we be more courageous ?

We have pedagogies of separation rather than pedagogies of connection.

Sometimes a focus on particular subjects creates disciplinary decadence, and as a result we cannot or don't see the interconnectedness.

Further limitations that were highlighted in the ways we work

- Stuck in silos, we struggle to work in more holistic, human and inter-connected ways
- We value 'evidence' (of the past), more than imagination (of possible futures)
- We tend to see the potential role of the arts narrowly

We need more
"gaiety transfiguring
all that dread"
(Yeats)

We need to tap into
the core Irish love
for fun and
community

We need to be out
of the classroom
more

We need to slow
down in order to be
less stretched and
more reflective

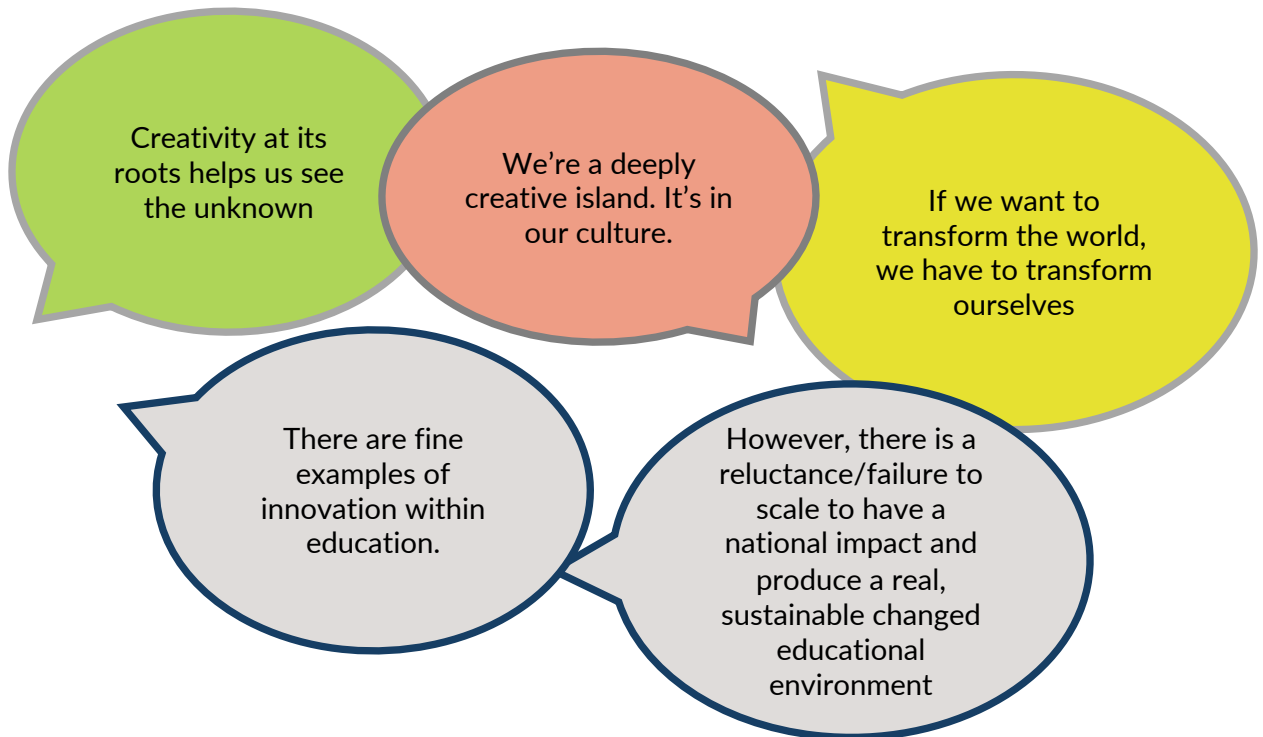
We are
disconnected from
the natural world

Schools are
designed very
linearly – it is
assumed students
only learn in line
with their age

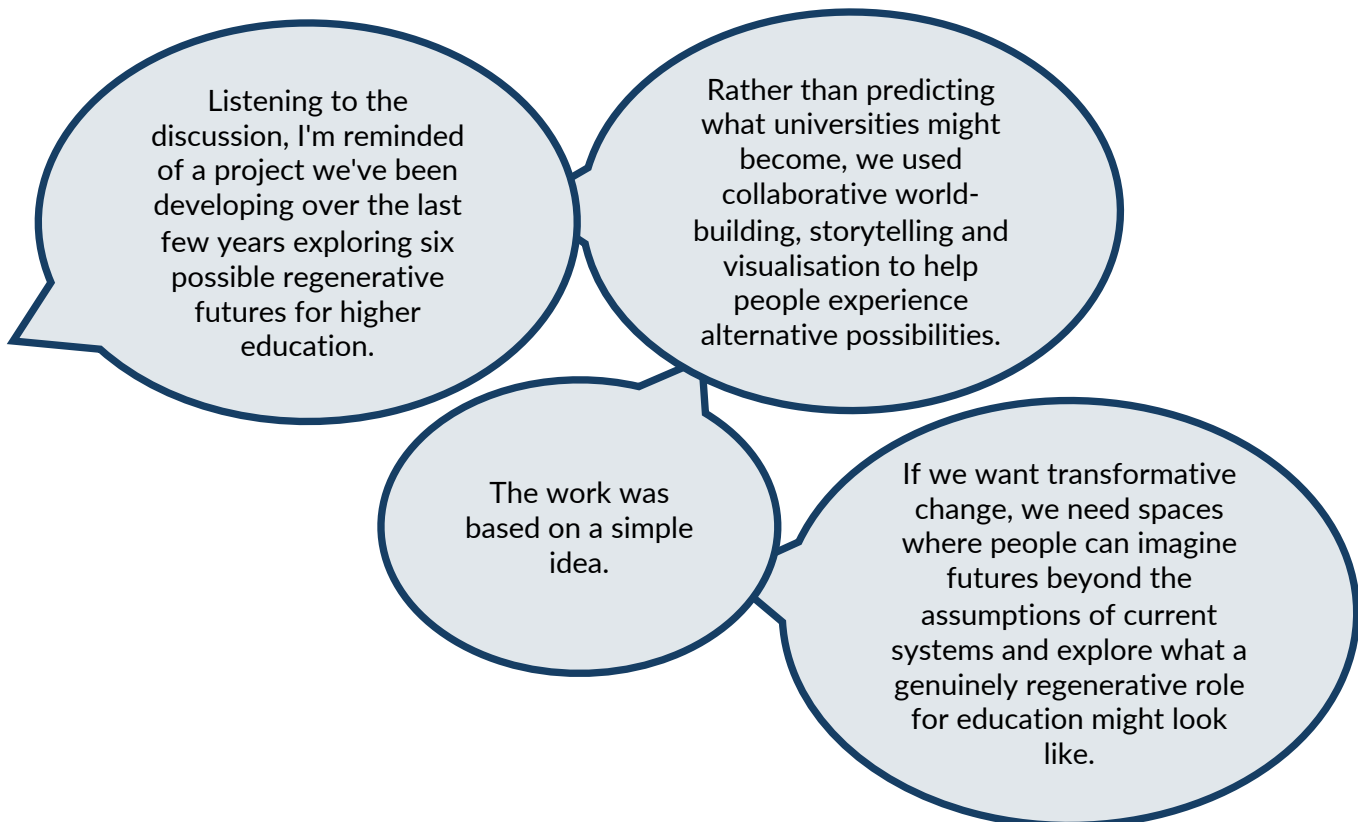
There is a lack of
capacity for
conversation –
especially difficult
conversations – basic
human interaction is at
stake



The beginnings of some responses



Limitations in how we look at the future





Since 2020, the OECD has developing far-reaching ideas on the future purposes of education, based on policy dialogues with seven high performing PISA systems.

prepares young people for yesterday's jobs, through cognitive examinations. *Education for Human Flourishing* will equip young people for lives of purpose and fulfilment.

The Human Capital model, which has shaped what students learn for many decades,

[Education for Human Flourishing | OECD](#)

Having lived for the last two years in Finland, I'm interested in the notion of Bildung and ego-development.

After its independence (in 1920) Finland focused its education system on unfolding that which is unique to each child/person

allowing them to feel a sense of belonging and responsibility to community, nation and wider world; helping all, particularly those at the margins, to develop their own opinion and path in life.

Many decades of holistic education have been developing, including around the global civil society vision of the Earth Charter, that is aligned with emergent conversations about personal, collective, planetary and intergenerational wellbeing and an ecological civilisation

Young people are educated to develop a civic sense of self which is very evident in society there.

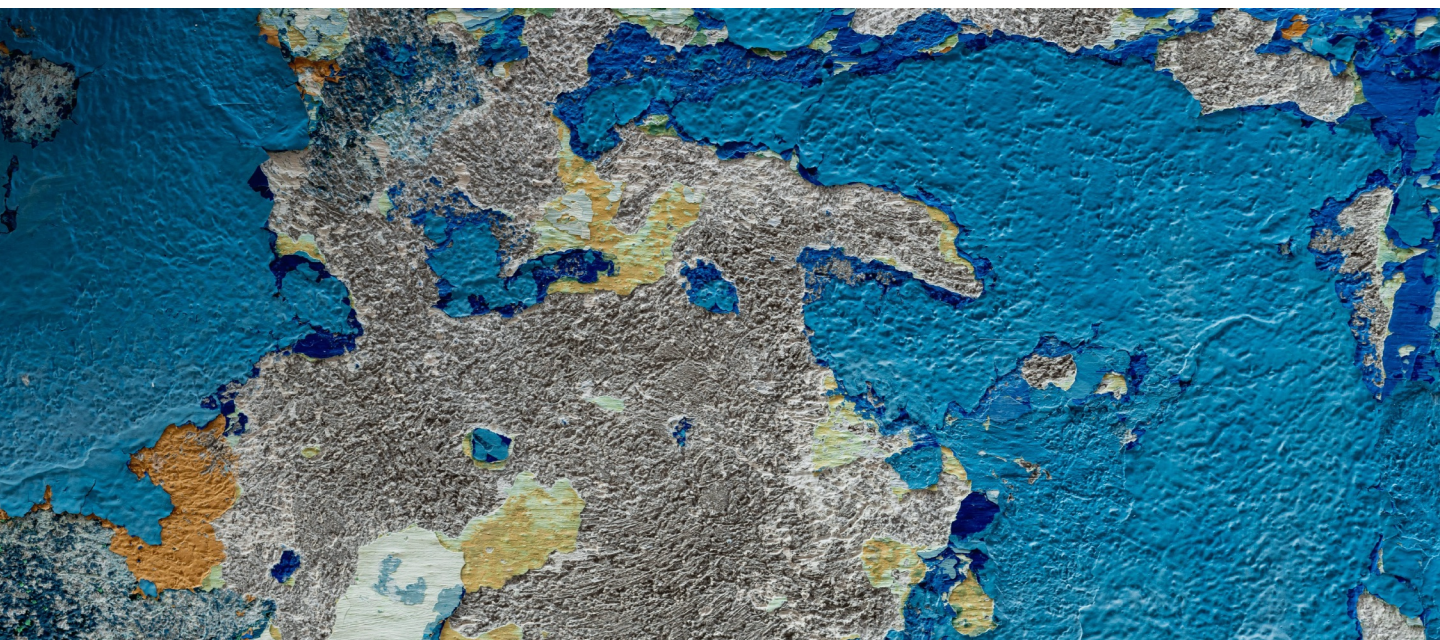
Key elements of ways forward identified

- Slowing down, reducing overwhelm
 - Thinking more about 'projects' and competencies - working less in silos
 - Investing in local experimentation
 - Getting better at spreading learning, where things have worked well
 - Making time to be more human, with
- more emphasis on relationships
 - Spending more time in nature - connecting to nature and each other

Allowing young people to be excited by the world.

Some implications for how we 'do' planning

- Be more honest about what we don't know and can't predict
 - Listen to voices from the margins - bring people into the room who wouldn't normally be there
 - 'Imagine' a variety of scenarios - don't fix on one vision - consider risks
 - Identify competencies and qualities that are likely to be helpful across a variety of scenarios
- Look for where those competencies and qualities already exist ('seeds of the future') and water those seeds
 - Identify structural and cultural dynamics that are inhibiting progress and 'disrupt' them
 - Experiment



Burren College of Art is a small, independent art school situated on the Wild Atlantic Way on the northwest coast of County Clare in Ireland. It has a particular interest in the principles and procedures of creative processes.

The work of the ReSource Centre at Burren College of Art (BCA) is based on collaboratively surfacing creative solutions to complex challenges. In 2017, mindful of the underlying shifts happening in the world, we posed ourselves the challenge: “What could BCA do to shift the Irish education system in a more creative direction?”

Our response was to convene representative voices from the education system for a deep dive process of listening in the 2018 Symposium ‘Towards a More Creative Education System’. Amongst other things, this helped bring about a government

commitment to a Citizens Assembly on Education, which later morphed into a commitment to the [Convention on Education](#)

The College recognises that it can offer a role as a convenor of conversations that may be difficult for others to initiate, including conversations where a neutral convenor may be advantageous. It also recognises that it has particular expertise in relation to creative process and working with nature and community.

The College remains committed to trying to be helpful where it can.

For further information, see [ReSource @ Burren College of Art](#)

