

UNESCO Chair in Children,
Youth and Civic Engagement

Professor Pat Dolan

Inaugural Lecture



Children and Citizenship:
Lessons from History,
Messages for the Future







Contents

Message from Mary McAleese
President of Ireland

Message from Mr Koïchiro Matsuura
Director-General of UNESCO

Message from Seán Campbell
CEO Foróige

Message from Dr. James J. Browne
President of NUI Galway

About the UNESCO Programme

Inaugural Lecture, Professor Pat Dolan
UNESCO Chair

About the Child and Family Research Centre







UACHTARÁN NA hÉIREANN
PRESIDENT OF IRELAND

MESSAGE FROM PRESIDENT MCALEESE

This new UNESCO Chair for Children, Youth and Civic Engagement, is a fitting endorsement by peers worldwide of the important work that is being done at the Child and Family Research Centre in NUI Galway to help solve the real problems experienced by young people and families in our communities. It is also a wonderful example of a space where theory, policy and practice meet, and where the focus is also very much on the commonality of these challenges to all societies worldwide.

I congratulate NUI Galway in hosting this prestigious new UNESCO Chair and I wish Professor Dolan, as first Chairholder, together with his partners in Foróige and his colleagues here in Ireland, and internationally, every success in undertaking this challenging but worthwhile endeavour.

MARY McALEESE
PRESIDENT OF IRELAND

February 2009





Message from Mr Koïchiro Matsuura, Director - General of UNESCO on the occasion of UNITWIN/UNESCO Chairs Programme and Ireland.

UNESCO is delighted to partner with the National University of Ireland, Galway (NUIG) in the establishment of the UNESCO Chair in Children, Youth and Civic Engagement - the first UNESCO Chair in the Republic of Ireland.

The Chair, to be hosted by the NUI Galway's Child and Family Research Centre (CFRC), joins a worldwide programme of 626 UNESCO Chairs and 60 UNITWIN Networks aimed at advancing research, strengthening human and institutional capacity, and fostering inter-university cooperation in key areas of UNESCO's mandate.

UNESCO's top priority is achieving quality Education for All (EFA) and the present Chair promises to contribute to this ambitious global agenda in a number of important ways.

Ireland has been a pioneer in developing models for civic education that encourage young people to think critically about society and their place within it. The new Chair can help to share knowledge and good practices on the promotion of civic engagement and leadership skills among children and youth and network University-based research centres and NGOs engaged in these issues. The Chair will give specific

focus to expanding access to learning and life-skills programmes for disadvantaged children and youth, targeting the deep inequalities in educational opportunity that continue to undermine progress towards EFA.

I would like to thank all those who contributed to the establishment of this important Chair. I wish to recognize the support of the Chair's two key partners in Ireland: the Community Knowledge Initiative at the NUI Galway and the national youth-based NGO, Foróige. Let me also congratulate Professor Pat Dolan on his appointment as the Chairholder. As Director of the CFRC, and with over 20 years experience in family support frontline work, policy and research, I am confident that he will do an excellent job.

The NUI Galway has a longstanding commitment to civic engagement. The creation of this Chair is an opportunity to expand and share this expertise for the benefit of children and young people everywhere, in particular the most vulnerable and marginalized.

Koïchiro Matsuura
Director - General
of UNESCO



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联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

Message from Foróige

I am in no doubt that our involvement in the UNESCO Chair in Children, Youth and Civic Engagement will give us further opportunity to reach even more young people in Ireland and beyond in the years to come.

On behalf of Foróige, National Youth Development Organisation, I wholeheartedly welcome the establishment of the UNESCO Chair in Children, Youth and Civic Engagement in NUI Galway. It is a great and fitting testament to the regard in which NUI Galway is held internationally and to the great work that is carried out in the Child and Family Research Centre. It is an honour of the highest order that Foróige is a partner in this wonderful initiative and I am certain that the meeting of theory, practice and policy that will result from this partnership will transform the lives of Young People the World over.

It is with great joy that I congratulate my colleague and friend, Professor Pat Dolan, on his selection as Chairholder and I wish him every success as he sets out on this momentous journey. Pat's ever deepening commitment to young people and children, particularly those facing adversity of one form or another, places him perfectly to ensure that this initiative is ground breaking and has a real and lasting impact on generations of young people. Foróige has been involved in promoting the value of Youth Leadership and Active Citizenship since 1952, so now, 57 years on, it is with pride and pleasure

that we join with Pat and his team as we enter a new era of learning in the field of Children, Youth and Civic Engagement.

The Civic Engagement of young people and the resulting developmental benefits is a key component of Foróige's purpose, which is, to enable young people to involve themselves, consciously and actively, in their own development and in the development of society. Through the permanent tsb Foróige Youth Citizenship Programme, over 10,000 young people every year make a positive difference to their communities. This programme empowers young people, it enhances their human development and it enables them to realise that they do have the power to make the world in which they live a better place. I am in no doubt that our involvement in the UNESCO Chair in Children, Youth and Civic Engagement will give us further opportunity to reach even more young people in Ireland and beyond in the years to come.

This is indeed a proud day for Ireland.

Seán Campbell
CEO Foróige





Foreword by Dr. James J. Browne, President of NUI Galway

Is mór an chúis onóra do OÉ Gaillimh go bhfuiltear ag bronnadh na chéad Chathaoireach UNESCO i bPoblacht na hÉireann uirthi.

Bunófar meicníocht fhoirmiúil le heolas a chruthú agus a mhalartú i réimse na Leanaí, na hÓige agus an Chomhpháirteachais Phoiblí i measc institiúidí ardoideachais agus eagraíochtaí neamhrialtais, agus idir na hinstiúidí agus na heagraíochtaí sin, go háirithe i gcás tíortha atá i mbéal forbartha agus tíortha atá ag dul trí thréimhse athraithe; is gné úrnua é seo d'obair na hOllscoile. Táimid ag súil go mbeidh rath ar an gcomhoibriú seo le UNESCO agus tá ríméad orainn deis a bheith againn cur le ról na hOllscoile i mbunú comhpháirtíochtaí sochaí sibhialta.

NUI Galway is particularly honoured to be awarded the first UNESCO Chair in the Republic of Ireland.

The establishment of a formal mechanism for knowledge creation and exchange in the area of Children, Youth and Civic Engagement across, and between, institutions of higher education and non-governmental organisations particularly with developing countries and countries in transition will bring a new dimension to the work of the University. We look forward to fruitful cooperation with

UNESCO and are delighted to have this opportunity to enhance the role of the University in building civil society partnerships.

The role of the University in the social fabric is of critical importance to NUI Galway. As part of this ethos, we have a specific commitment to embracing community and civic engagement as a core part of our mission. Currently, through the Community Knowledge Initiative, the University is at the forefront in Ireland of pioneering models for civic engagement including service learning and volunteering programmes that annually actively engage over 1,500 NUI Galway students to think critically about society and their place within it, locally, nationally and internationally. Over 40 academic staff co-ordinate 25 service learning modules across the disciplines that engage student learning with over 80 different voluntary and community organisations. In addition, NUI Galway leads a national network entitled 'Campus Engage' which seeks to evolve civic engagement activities across higher education in Ireland.

The UNESCO Chair will provide an academic portal through which to share expertise and knowledge related to civic engagement and also to gather international knowledge related to the civic purpose of higher education and its application at the institutional level.

The UNESCO Chair, hosted in the School of Political Science and Sociology, will strengthen NUI Galway's international reputation in Applied Social Science research. It will be based in the Child and Family Research Centre which has attained international recognition for its expertise in applied practice and high quality research in relation to working with young people experiencing adversity. Building on these and existing strengths in the Social Sciences, a huge range of interdisciplinary research and teaching activities are taking place across this institution to help build a better, more community based society. Ensuring greater social inclusion is a major task, requiring high quality applied research that influences policy and practice. The activities of the Chair will further facilitate the emergence of new areas of research that are concerned with achieving positive social change within a framework of civic engagement

On behalf of the University, I gratefully acknowledge the supporters that have contributed to research and education in these core areas of strength at NUI Galway - The Atlantic Philanthropies, the Health Service Executive and Foróige. I warmly welcome and thank our colleagues from UNESCO and look forward to a partnership with potential for building new structures of co-operation with universities around the world through an exchange of research, training and policy initiatives.

Cuirim fáilte chroíúil roimh ár gcomhghleacaithe as UNESCO agus táim ag súil le comhpháirtíocht a mb'fhéidir go bhféadfaí struchtúir nua a bhunú léi ina mbeifí ag comhoibriú le hollscoileanna ar fud an domhain, trí mhalartú taighde, oiliúna agus tionscnamh beartais.

James J. Browne
Ph.D., D.Sc., MRIA, C.Eng.
Uachtarán - President



National University of Ireland, Galway
Ollscoil na hÉireann, Gaillimh

Children, Youth and Civic Engagement

Core areas of activity for the UNESCO programme launched at NUI, Galway on March 4, 2009 include Research, Teaching, Advocacy & Policy and Programme Development / Quality Testing

Research

The research component of the Chair's activities builds on the Child and Family Research Centre's (CFRC) knowledge and expertise in Family Support theory and practice. The Centre's focus on preventative and supportive measures to strengthen the capacity of children and families undergoing adversity is reflected in core themes of social support, resilience and social ecology theory, and in conducting applied research that informs policy and practice with a view to improving the lives of disadvantaged children and youth. Collaboration will take place nationally and internationally with a range of affiliated universities with specialist expertise in children and youth.

Key research themes that will guide this work include:

- Looking at the most effective interventions for enhancing young people's civic engagement

- Examining how civic engagement among young people affects them, for example, in terms of their aspirations, sense of social justice, resilience, social support networks and well-being
- Determining the extent to which the engagement of young people has an impact on the communities in which they live, or on broader institutional or societal dynamics.

Teaching

In the area of education and teaching, activities will include the development of two international distance MA programmes and specialised PhD training. A new distance education UNESCO Masters in Youth Leadership and Civic Engagement is planned as part of the NUI Galway partnership with Foróige in collaboration with other national and international University partners. The CFRC's established MA in Family Support Studies is to be internationalised in countries prioritised by UNESCO and delivered via distance education. A new, structured cross-national PhD programme in Child and Youth Studies is planned to prepare graduates from a range of disciplines to conduct high quality policy and practice-relevant research and programme evaluation with children and young people. It will include an area of focus on civic engagement and resilience in children and youth.



Advocacy and Policy

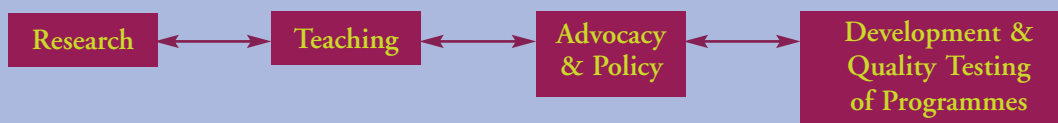
Among international development agencies, civic engagement is widely embraced as a youth intervention. At partner sites in developing countries and states in transition, the place of civic engagement will be explored in the context of national strategies and public policies focused on youth. The outputs from the project will assist in the development of national and cross-national guidelines around youth civic engagement policy formation, implementation, and evaluation. They will have relevance for national decision-makers wishing to formulate civic engagement policy. Work shall be planned and undertaken with youth and in coordination with government and non-government sectors, regional bodies, national youth NGOs, and agents from the private sector and civil society engaged in service delivery.

On the island of Ireland, through collaboration between the UNESCO Chairs in NUI, Galway and the University of Ulster, this strand will establish an independent monitoring programme on the wellbeing of children and young people North and South. It will develop an independent, critical analysis of effective investments, provision and outcomes for children and young people by providing a strong evidence base to inform policy and practice in both jurisdictions. The tools developed will be utilised by UNESCO to provide a template for analysis and policy indicators in other jurisdictions.

Development and Quality Testing of Programmes

A key feature of the incoming Chair's programme will involve linking research, policy and practice through the development, further enhancement and quality assurance of child and youth leadership programmes in civic engagement. The youth programme activities will be led by the key NGO partner Foróige, and will incorporate best practice methodologies with due sensitivity to issues of cultural competence and transference among indigenous child and youth populations and service providers.

The programme interventions will be, in the main, youth led with a strong emphasis on youth participation. Also, as there are many models on civic activity for children and youth among partner countries, quality assurance on implementation may be the focus in certain contexts. Specifically, consultation on the evaluation of youth mentoring interventions, for instance, the Big Brother Big Sisters Programme and on volunteering programmes and citizenship/leadership programmes will be made available as models of best practice to be applied by participating partners. Their potential in terms of enabling resilience and acting as support to disassociated youth at risk of adversity will be fundamental to the reciprocal learning planned among partner NGOs and universities.





Professor
Pat Dolan

Children and Citizenship: Lessons from History, Messages for the Future

As John McGahern advocates, experiencing a ‘precious life is everything’ and is an innate desire for us all regardless of age, gender, class, culture, or nationality. This is also the aspiration that any reasonable, caring parent has for their child. But while many young people thrive during childhood, others sadly do not experience life as good or safe and some more tragically can say they rarely have a ‘calm journey through the day’.

In recent years, much international attention has focused on how best to support vulnerable children and youth and this quest is core to the mission of UNESCO, UNICEF and the United Nations. Clearly, the harsh experience of many children often demands remedial interventions that sometimes culminate in their removal from their families and communities. On the other hand, with support, children can and do overcome adversity. There is growing research evidence pointing to the merits of prevention and early intervention delivered through Family Support methods as an effective approach to social policy and service provision particularly in disadvantaged communities. Family Support is about building on the strengths

Summary of the remarks made by Professor Pat Dolan at the official launch of the UNESCO Chair in Children, Youth and Civic Engagement on March 4, 2009.

“I take the belief that the best of life is life lived quietly, where nothing happens but our calm journey through the day, where change is imperceptible and the precious life is everything”

- (John McGahern, Memoir, 2005)

of children, their families and communities. It recognises children’s and families’ own strengths as a resource for addressing problems they face. It emphasises the importance that networks - formal, informal and semi-formal - have in enhancing coping capacity among people undergoing adversity and stresses the importance of interventions that build these networks. Since its foundation, the work of the Child and Family Research Centre at

NUI Galway has focused on advancing Family Support as one key way to help troubled and troublesome children.

Our research and teaching programme seeks to access better knowledge in what works for those families who experience adversity and act as broker between theory and practice in sharing what makes a difference for children and parents who need or use services. Within the context of understanding the centrality of Family Support, nuclear and extended kinships, friends, school and community resources are the proven primary sources of help, and may often be unsung and overlooked heroes in the lives of children.

Family Support draws on the positive assets and attributes of young people in the context of their family, school and community settings. Children have proven capacity to be civically active in communities where by

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being supportive to others they benefit themselves in terms of improved self-esteem, self-efficacy and wellbeing. Through engagement, children can make a real difference in the civic life of their communities and at the same time, create space to express their views and engage in decision making. Indeed, based on my life experiences, years of direct work with young people, their parents and communities, and

from my academic research, I have come to the conclusion, that civically engaging children and youth produces benefits for all children. Particularly in the case of children who are experiencing severe difficulties, their civic engagement can lead to significant improvement and help rebuild key relationships in their lives.

Supporting children who experience adversity and disadvantage through encouraging civic participation has been advocated for some considerable time. In the next section, I draw attention to the emphasis placed by pioneering Irish women in the early years of the twentieth century and the writer Charles Dickens in championing the public role and value of children. Through civic engagement, children's social support networks improve and this can have profound positive implications for their coping capacity

during childhood and later life. These concepts are explored overleaf. Finally, the core ideas and work programme for the UNESCO programme on Children Youth and Civic Engagement are described.

Lessons from History

From history, there are several examples where civic activity by youth has been advocated or where disadvantaged children have benefited from having been given leadership roles due to the efforts of pioneering individuals including philanthropists. Two examples from Ireland demonstrate this interest. Prior to the formation of the Irish State, the idea of engaging children as citizens was pioneered by women such as Constance Countess Markievicz, Maud Gonne, Dr Kathleen Lynn, Sinéad de Valera and others. It is noteworthy that they did this over 100 years ago at a time when child death was common in Ireland. At that time, many children were living in abject poverty, most notably in Dublin City, which, in the early 1900s contained some of the worst slums in Europe. These women advocated for children when the concept of a child being seen as 'individual' was unheard of. Specifically, this manifested itself in a number of ways. By the creation of Inghinidhe na hÉireann (the Daughters of Ireland), the importance of civic activity and youth leadership was developed throughout Dublin City. These pioneer women successfully brought 30,000 children to Clonturk Park (sic Croke Park Dublin) without incident. In a farseeing move, they recognised children as important and having something to offer to civic society, and in effect, gathered children in Ireland (probably for the first time) in order for them to declare their presence.

While Charles Dickens is most famous for his fictional depictions of impoverished children and their need for social justice, his role as a philanthropist and youth mentor is less known. Dickens worked actively for the education and better living conditions of children, at the same time he also saw children as having enormous potential in civic society and as

players in their own fortunes. This manifested itself in his novels, and in the two projects for children which he established and supported. For example in 'Great Expectations' the young child Pip becomes the donator of help to the convict Magwitch (who later becomes his education sponsor). Pip is portrayed as the source of support to adults in his local community, in effect a role reversal of children being seen as pure recipients of help from others and society.

Dickens worked actively for the education and better living conditions of children but he also saw children as having enormous potential in civic society and as players in their own fortunes

Dickens also established the Urania Cottage Project, a residential home for homeless girls in central London. The Urania Project was unique in that it operated way ahead of its time with a culture whereby residents (many of whom were teenagers) dictated the rules and regime of the home and offered help in return for receiving help. Furthermore, while working as a clerk in a law firm, Dickens was active as an education mentor to illiterate children in the "Ragged Schools Project". The programme operated in the evenings whereby children would come on to the street and meet mentors with chalk and slate and be instructed. Notably, Dickens insisted that older children who benefited from the programme became mentors to other children in need.

Both Dickens and these pioneering Irish women were therefore strong advocates for children's rights and for the public presence of young people. Today, these ideals are echoed in academic research on civic engagement, social support, and resilience that is drawing attention worldwide to the significance of social support mechanisms for disadvantaged children.

Social Support

Social support or 'acts of assistance between people' has been described as the 'bread and butter' of relationships because its presence is essential to everyday living. The benefits of having support are proven and manifold. Social support provides a buffer to stress in that those who can access support deal with issues better and are even less likely to experience crisis to begin with. It is associated with better mental health, and crucially, from the point of view of civic engagement, operates on the basis that

A sense of engagement and belonging in a community (geographical or group) is one of the key protective factors which foster resilience in childhood.

donation of support to others has benefits equal to that of being a recipient of help. Apart from the importance of informal sources, social support needs to be available in different forms and levels including practical and emotional sustenance.

Finding ways of enabling children and young people to be more resilient in the face of risk or harm is a major research concern. Resilience is the capacity to cope or bounce back in life, it is characterised as the ability to overcome the odds and is typified by being able to do better than expected. I propose that where civic engagement is strong and social support real and available for a young person, conditions for the enablement of such resilience will be stronger.

A sense of engagement and belonging in a community (geographical or group) is one of the key protective factors which foster resilience in childhood.

Described as the ordinary magic of daily life, in basic terms, resilience is aided by having regular community routines all typically available within a civic activity and engagement context.

Apart from social support and resilience, reciprocity of rights and respect for children and youth should not be overlooked as a key underpinning for their civic engagement. Just like adults, young people have much to contribute to society, however, this contribution will be contextualised within the prevailing culture and with regard to how children are valued. For example, in European countries currently in transition while there is a tradition of accessing the opinion of youth, this is not always reflected in evidence of their being overt active players in communities. In sub-Sahara countries, gender

difference is often a prominent issue in civic society, not just in terms of political activation but also in community contexts. For example, the capacity of girls in Zambia to engage as active citizens in their local schools is often muted.

In Ireland, the extent to which the voice of disadvantaged children and youth is heard compared to those who have wealth is an issue. Even at the basic level of respect, how many young people are asked to purchase now or leave the restaurant, how many are skipped in a queue to begin with or how many when they go on to the street have a high frequency alarm sound in their ear to keep them moving. When adults gather to talk in communities it is described as social capital building, yet when youth do so it is seen as loitering - and this is before we consider more serious issues of child discrimination among the disadvantaged.

Messages for the Future:

The UNESCO programme on Children Youth and Civic Engagement at NUI Galway

The establishment of a UNESCO Chair in Children, Youth & Civic Engagement will share the expertise of University-based research centres and NGOs working on educational issues that directly impact policy and practice in this area and will bring together international organisations with a shared goal of promoting civic engagement and leadership skills among children and youth. The project will deliver a programme of work in civic engagement for children and youth with the objective of providing relevant expertise in theory, practice and policy and establishing international links and networking in this field of education. The Chair, in association with its Irish partners, the Community Knowledge Initiative at NUI Galway, a student volunteering programme and Foróige, Ireland's leading youth work NGO, will focus on bringing learning to international University partners and affiliated centres for children initially in Bulgaria, Lithuania and Zambia, with other participating countries to follow. Emphasis will be placed on developing and sharing practice models and on the dissemination and exchange of knowledge among partners.

The project will be framed in the broader context of the role that research can play in shaping policy debates and informing practice that brings about better outcomes for disadvantaged children and youth.

Core research questions that will guide the programme include:

- What assumptions are at play in different countries regarding young people's status, rights and expectations for their role in society?
- What are the ways (mechanisms, programmes, institutions, processes) in which young people are able to (and in fact) participate civically and politically, both formally and informally?
- What are the barriers to engagement faced by young people in different contexts?
- What are the most effective interventions for enhancing young people's civic engagement?
- How does civic engagement among young people affect them, for example, in terms of their aspirations, sense of social justice, resilience, social support networks and well-being?
- To what extent, and in what ways, does the engagement of young people have an impact on the communities in which they live, or on broader institutional or societal dynamics?

Concluding Messages

Looking ahead, core principles that support youth policy are stated in the UNESCO vision as – decreasing vulnerability, increasing their social support systems, supporting the development of their human and social identity and helping to achieve a secure beginning. The mechanism of civic engagement offers great potential for accomplishing these objectives. A fundamental component of national youth policy identified by UNESCO is the “enabling” environment provided to youth and the fulfilment of their civic potential.

Over time, working in collaboration with UNESCO partners at the University of Ulster as well as other Chairs and NGOs, we will establish baseline data on civic engagement levels of youth and their wellbeing in each country which will inform policy-making and youth profiles. Through the UNESCO office and the project partners, work will be planned and undertaken with youth and in coordination with government and non-government sectors, regional bodies, national youth NGOs (mostly led by Fóroige Ireland), and agents from the private sector and civil society engaged in service delivery.

Debates about the role of evidence in influencing policy and the challenges associated with bridging research, policy and practice in international development will provide the context for planning the initiative. In this regard, and cognisant of the role of Chairs, as “think tanks and bridge-builders between research and civil society, and between research and policy making”, the project proposes to work closely with UNESCO in producing research that meets the needs of policymakers, in entering into dialogue with policymakers, and effectively communicating and disseminating findings particularly with a view to social justice enablement.

Ultimately whereas our activities will centre on research, policy, advocacy, teaching and programme development, proof of success will be more basic. Most important, if as a result of the UNESCO programme on Children Youth and Civic Engagement, it can be proven that younger people are respected, included more, active and engaged citizens in their community, with enhanced social support networks and greater resilience, then the journey will have been well worthwhile. In the words of Charles Dickens every child deserves “Great Expectations” and should experience life in the mode of John McGahern as ‘precious’ and with ‘calm journeys’ through each day.

Pat Dolan

Chairholder - UNESCO Chair for Children, Youth and Civic Engagement

In memory of my parents Mollie and Michéal Dolan, and my brother Matt Dolan.



About the Child and Family Research Centre



The Child & Family Research Centre (CFRC) is a partnership between the Health Service Executive and the National University of Ireland, Galway. The Centre, based in NUI, Galway's School of Political Science and Sociology was officially launched in 2007 by President Mary McAleese with significant support from The Atlantic Philanthropies.

In support of its mission to improve outcomes for children and their families, and advance practice and policy in Ireland and internationally, the CFRC undertakes research, education and training in the area of child and family care and welfare. The Centre is internationally recognised as a leader in the theory and practice of Family Support. It is affiliated with a range of university centres of excellence, NGOs and civil society organisations dedicated to enhancing the welfare of and improving opportunities for disadvantaged children and their families.

The CFRC engages in research, evaluation and service development relating to practice, policy and interventions in the lives of children. Research undertaken is strongly connected to applied work for children and families and relevant to a broad range of stakeholders including service users, policymakers, and frontline staff.

In the area of education and training, the CFRC offers an MA in Family Support studies for professionals working in state and voluntary services on behalf of children and families. Expanding postgraduate education activities include a newly-established joint PhD programme with Trinity College Dublin which will provide inter-institutional, structured doctoral training in Child and Youth research.

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