General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland

termtalk

Welcome to our third edition of **termtalk.** When it reaches you, the Council will have collected its first fee from all registered teachers. This heralds a new era of financial independence and opens up new horizons for the Council.

In addition, we have published major reports on teacher competences and continuing professional development. These reports mark a coming of age for the Council; for the first time teachers, through their professional body, have identified the competences underpinning their work. The Council considers that these reports are of seminal importance, not just in regard to initial teacher education and subsequent professional development, but indeed in the emerging processes in respect of PRSD. All of these issues are explored elsewhere in this edition.

In this edition, for the first time, we have given over a significant element to a single issue, namely ICT. You will be aware that LearningNI is becoming available and will provide unique opportunities to integrate ICT into classroom learning. In recognition of this new era of connectivity, we asked Mr John Anderson, the Education Technology Strategy Co-ordinator, to act as guest editor. John and his colleagues have produced a range of articles, which we hope you will find informative.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to wish you all a restful and restorative summer break!

Eddie McArdle

Eddie McArdle
Registrar, GTCNI

GTCNI: Reviews of Teacher Competences and CPD

The Registrar, Mr Eddie McArdle, reflects on recent work undertaken by the Council.

"Over the past year we have been engaged in a major review of teacher competences and professional development. The significance of this cannot be overestimated for, in articulating the competences underpinning the work of teachers, the Council has effectively defined what it means to be a professional educator in Northern Ireland.

This is a major step for us as a profession; for the first time the professional body has assumed this seminal responsibility. No longer are the attributes, knowledge and value system which defines teaching decided by others.

Such authority is an essential pre-requisite for true professional status. The articulation of the competence base for teaching, and the codification of the values of the profession, marks the beginning of a new era for the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland, and more importantly for the profession it serves.

The review identifies 27 competences underpinning teaching, and has incorporated within the competences, the Council's recently published Code of Values and Professional Practice. Work in this area was informed by inputs from Professor Geoff Whitty and Sarah Bubb of the Institute of Education, London, both of whom are acknowledged experts in the area of competences and authors of numerous academic works on professional development.

With PRSD now imminent it is imperative that all engaged in that process become au fait with the new competences and how they should inform, in part, needs identification and objective setting.

In addition to its work on what might be called 'core competences', the Council initiated an in depth review of continuing professional development and how that might be underpinned by an enabling framework of extended competences.

The implication of both the core competences and the CPD framework for PRSD will be addressed elsewhere in **termtalk** and you are advised to read that article and then to visit the GTCNI website at **www.gtcni.org.uk** where details of the competences and the new proposals for CPD can be found."

GTCNI - a new voice for teachers

Education Northern Ireland (ENI) 2005

ENI 2005 will be held on the 13th and 14th October in the Kings Hall, Belfast. It will provide an outstanding opportunity to see, test and compare all the latest products and services from leading educational resources suppliers. ENI 2005 is organised by the British Educational Suppliers Association (BESA) and supported by DE, the ELBs, the Regional Training Unit, GTCNI and the teacher associations.

The event this year will focus on all aspects of educational change and enable educators at all levels to deal with the new learning landscape, and will include an extensive seminar programme. Register online now at **www.eni.org.uk**

Entitled to Succeed Newsletter

"Entitled to Succeed" is a newsletter issued periodically to all schools by the Department of Education. It aims to keep Principals, teachers, other staff and Boards of Governors informed about education reforms, including the new post-primary arrangements.

The first edition was issued in December last year, and the second edition will reach schools next term. If you would like further information on "Entitled to Succeed", or if you would like additional copies of the next or previous edition, please contact the Department:

by phone: 028 9127 9296 or by fax: 028 9127 9710

by e-mail: ppst@deni.gov.uk

by writing to: Post-Primary Support Team, Department of Education, Rathgael House, Balloo Road, Bangor, Co Down, BT19 7PR; or

by downloading the newsletter from the DE website at **www.deni.gov.uk/pprb/index.htm**

Winning Ways

Northern Ireland teachers and schools continue their winning ways in UK-wide competitions. This reflects the effective embedding of ICT into teaching and learning. Congratulations to the most recent winners!

Becta's Creativity in Digital Media Awards 2005

Cookstown Primary School, Joanne Murray and Paula Burnside's P7 classes, for the second year running, with "Snowy's Spotty Adventure - The Movie".
St Malachy's College, Belfast with "What's in the fridge?" See these videos on **www.becta.org.uk**

Becta ICT Practice Awards 2005

Harold Brownlow, principal of Ballymena Primary School.
Stephen Sames, science teacher at Aquinas Grammar, Belfast
Lorraine Lavery, lecturer in BIFHE
The Scholar e-learning project, this project involved the collaboration of St. Columb's College, Limavady Grammar, Foyle and Londonderry and Antrim Grammar, with the Scottish Scholar project, whereby online learning content for science, mathematics and computing provided a context for online tutoring and peer support for A-level students.

TES and Ramesys Learning Environment of the Year 2004

Outright UK winner **Holy Cross Boys' Primary School, Belfast** for outstanding innovation in e-learning.

PRSD:
A New Opportunity?

From the start of the new academic year all within the profession will have to engage with the new Performance Review and Staff Development (PRSD) scheme. The Council has a statutory responsibility to offer advice on this issue, and our advice to the Minister on PRSD is posted on our website (www.gtcni.org.uk); click on publications, then on journals and newsletters/internal publications. The advice document is entitled "Management of Professional Development".

The notion of professional development is not new; indeed many of us will recall the old SDPR scheme which, while well intentioned, failed to find favour with the profession or indeed to engender a sense of ownership in teachers. The introduction of the new scheme, agreed between teacher unions and management, represents a new beginning in that the process has been formalised, and indeed, a province-wide training programme has been initiated under the auspices of the Regional Training Unit.

As has been noted we have already endured one abortive attempt at institutionalising performance review; with all of the attendant difficulties and nugatory work associated with the failure of that initiative. It is important that we do not repeat the mistakes of the past. The notion of PRSD, if it is to be meaningful, is inextricably tied to the provision of opportunities for professional dialogue and the provision of appropriately resourced development opportunities. In short, the "review element" is meaningless unless the circumstances are created that facilitate reflection and the resources are made available to facilitate development.

The notion of on-going development is not new in the world of professional practice; it is a feature of other professions such as Medicine, Pharmacy and Law. The teaching profession, by adopting a new Code of Values and Professional Practice, has made it explicit that the updating of knowledge and skills, and engaging in dialogue with others, are fundamental manifestations of teacher professionalism. The Code notes that teachers will:

The Challenge of Change

emPowering Schools in Northern Ireland
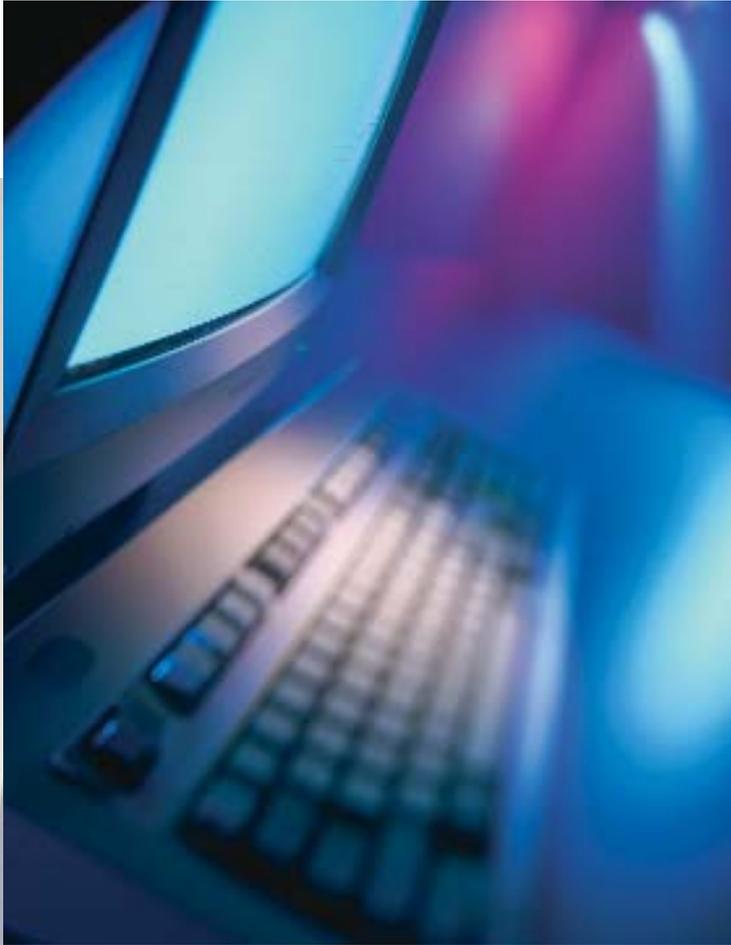
emPowering Schools to cope with changes that the new electronic and online multimedia technologies bring to teaching and learning, is the main emphasis of the new strategy for ICT in schools.

A top priority is to develop the professional capacity of all staff - teachers and those who support teaching and learning - to embed the use of ICT into their practice, and to make the best use of the major investments in technology made by government through C2k, and by schools themselves. All schools need to become familiar with the emPowering Schools strategy **www.empoweringschools.com** and consider how to address the milestones for whole school improvement it sets out.

Embedding ICT in all aspects of practice: learning, teaching, professional development and school management, within the context of whole school improvement, gives a chance for schools to use technology to cope with the challenges facing them in the years ahead.

"e-learning needs to become part of the professional competence of all educators."
(Gordon Topping, Chairman of the ET Strategy Management Group)

The curriculum advisory and support services in all Boards are working closely with the Regional Training Unit, on behalf of the Education Technology Strategy Management Group, to help selected schools, in 2005-06, develop, share and disseminate new practices. Staff in these schools will have an opportunity to engage in continuing professional development online. Further support for schools will be available with the graduation of the first 28 online educators, from the Regional Training Unit's Online Learning and Teaching for Educators Programme. They have the knowledge and experience to support curriculum development and professional learning in online environments.

Ultimately, the successful implementation of this strategy depends, to a large extent, on how change is supported and managed, and how resources are made available to help teachers develop new competences. In order to embrace change, awareness must be raised, and one approach to this is to provide relevant examples of what constitutes current good practice. This themed edition of **termtalk** is an attempt to do this by providing some examples of innovative practices and ideas.

In *Primary Transformations* principal Alastair Mackay talks about how ICT has transformed the teaching and learning environment in his school and Julie Adamson explains how using *The Victorian Big House run by Textease Studio Plus* helps motivate a P7 class. In *It's not a bore with Clicker 4,* George Blackwood shares the magic of children making "Talking Books". Mary Mallon, in *Mathematically challenged* looks at how ICT excites more able pupils. Then, in *Online early professional development for special education teachers*, Norma Price reports on a recent project, and *It's Symbol when you know how*, by Lisa Brown, explores ICT in a moderate learning difficulties class. In *It's almost like having a portable classroom* Ciaran McCrumlish looks at using VLEs in AVCE courses, and *You Decide ... Online* is Stephen Roulston's account of an innovative A-Level geography project. In *Saving Lives Online,* Eleanore Thomas describes the new and exciting PSNI resource now available online in LearningNI.

Finally, looking outside Northern Ireland, John Anderson describes two co-operative projects; a north/south dimension in *ICT dissolving boundaries* and a Japanese experience in *Kore wa nan desu ka* and, looking onwards and upwards to the stars, an account of the Faulkes Telescope, *Star Gazing in Class.*

Over the past 4 years, the Regional Training Unit's international programme has included the attendance, by a small group of educators, at Alan November's Summer Conferences in Boston, USA. (www.anovember.com). Alastair Mackay, principal of Finaghy Primary School, went in July 2002 and the experience changed his world view in a way that has now transformed his school.

"Having been a student with Alan November ... I am conscious of the present and future global implications of ICT in education and in life."

Returning from this experience Alastair was determined to initiate change. He explains how the adoption of new technologies has impacted on teaching and learning in his school.

"In April 2004 we moved to a brand new school building. One dream was to have an interactive whiteboard and multimedia system in every classroom. With our private sector partners and C2K, and with some creative budgeting, we achieved our dream 17 times over, with the technology fully integrated into the fabric of the building. It's quite unique, and has enabled us to transform how teachers and learners behave in the classroom. The traditional teacher's desk is long gone. Teacher and children share hi-tech, flat panel workstations linked to a C2K system, scanner, television/video/DVD with amplified audio and, through a whiteboard, to internet access.

The teaching and learning implications are enormous. After only one month teachers gave written feedback and everyone was a complete convert. They said they felt invigorated, challenged and immensely rewarded. Now, all are certified interactive whiteboard users and many are keen for advanced training. Whole-class teaching is taking on entirely new dimensions: lessons are more imaginative, stimulating, appealing and thought-provoking. From as young as four years, children engage in information searches, research, and use interactive learning techniques. Older children make technically challenging presentations to their peers and engage in complex problem-solving projects using the technology. Teachers use memory sticks and public folders online to share ideas, links, work, presentations and study materials they have prepared, and to complete administrative tasks.

Our school has been transformed into a 'community campus', used by our community partners for adult

Robert McCombe's P4 children use the whiteboard.

education. It's an integral part of our strategic vision. One of our aims is to become a 'centre of excellence' in the use of interactive teaching, enabling us to stay at the cutting edge and inspire others within and beyond our own community."

The Victorian Big House run by Textease Studio Plus

Imagine the challenge of running a Victorian household. Pauline Brown, vice-principal of Killcooley PS, Bangor, tells how an innovative package can replace the traditional Victorian household journal with a spreadsheet and, in so doing, bring the past to life. The package also enabled her pupils to create an advertisement for a new butler, to write a letter of dismissal to one of the servants, and design and write a Victorian newspaper with the latest news.

Pauline introduced the The Victorian Big House project to her P7 class by using electronic flipcharts on the interactive whiteboard. Textease Studio allows users to combine all aspects of the task in one program. Pauline explains;

"Once the pupils learnt the controls they didn't have to learn another application."

The pupils gathered information, text, clipart, video clips and links to appropriate web pages from the Internet.

This is better because you can paint the picture straight onto the page and you don't have to copy and paste. Kyle

The spreadsheet and charts were dynamically linked and when the data were altered the graphs automatically updated. Pauline adds;

"The pupils could easily import graphics for their advertisement and set out their work in the form of a newspaper. The canvas and paint toolbox allowed the pupils to design a graphic for their letterhead and combine this with their letter without importing or copying from a separate painting program.

Pupils could wrap text around the spreadsheet as it was already displayed on a Textease page. It was easy to 'click anywhere' to put in text and graphics."

I like the way you can make your writing speak. Ross

The integrated nature of Textease Studio Plus means that separate programs don't need to be opened. For more on Textease Studio Plus go to: **www.softease.com/studioplusinfo.htm**

Or contact Julie Adamson **jadamson@softease.com** (07841560131)

It's not a bore with Clicker 4!

Many teachers are familiar with using Clicker as a talking word processor to scaffold children's writing, but few are aware of its creative aspects.

Creating "Talking Books" has fantastic potential for pupils to make a range of multimedia cross-curricular materials by adding graphics, text and sounds, including clipart, downloaded images, digital photographs and even video. It's really easy to place - just click on the item. Text font, sizes and colours are easily changed and most exciting is that teachers and pupils can add their own voices!

> *We found that Clicker is an easily managed and effective resource. The children took immediate control of the environment and felt at ease when attempting to create new resources.*
>
> *Pilib Mistéil, Principal, Bunscoil an tSleibhe Dhuibh*

"Talking Books" provide purpose and audience for the children's writing - for groups, their own class or other classes. Older children make books to re-tell stories to younger children and present them through projector or whiteboard. Teachers make visually stimulating books as a teaching resource.

And it's no problem to record and write in other languages, a real advantage for Irish medium schools.

Real gains have come in developing literacy through other curriculum areas. Using images from the Internet, P7 pupils in St. John the Baptist Girls' added text and their own voices to write books about Victorian children and schools.

It's not a bore with Clicker 4!
Aine, St. John the Baptist Girls'

P7 authors from St. John the Baptist Girls'

> *The children are all well experienced at presentation packages but this was a new and exciting program to them. The favourite feature was clearly hearing their own voices reading the stories. A great success all round. This mixed ability group took to it instantly and mastered all the features very quickly.*
>
> *Maureen Magowan, Vice-Principal, St. John the Baptist Girls'*

Congratulations are in order to the staff and pupils of St. John the Baptist Girls', Bunscoil an tSleibhe Dhuibh and Arvalee School and Resource Centre, Omagh for being three of the ten UK winners of the recent TES/Crick competition.

For further details contact: George Blackwood at george.blackwood@cricksoft.com (07841560130) and see: www.cricksoft.com

Bhí sé an mhaith agus bhain muid sult as. (It was very good and we enjoyed it).

Ryan, Bunscoil an tSleibhe Dhuibh
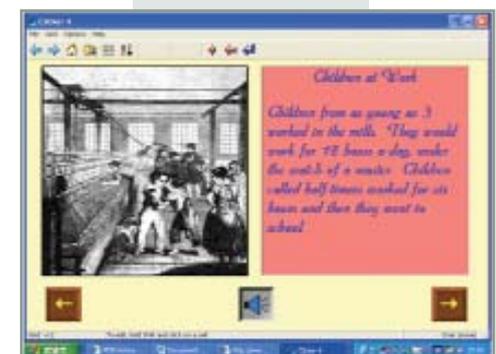
I thought that Clicker was a very good and exciting program. The Talking Book is a good way to learn about a new topic.   Rosie, St. John the Baptist

Mathematically challenged

Using computers to engage and motivate reluctant learners is widely understood, but stimulating the more-able child is much less common, especially when the challenging mathematical thinking and problem-solving means creating web-pages, tangram screen designs and learning with children in other schools through an online environment.

KS2 pupils from five primaries and their teachers worked with numeracy advisory assistants from the Belfast, Southern and South-Eastern Boards and Mary Mallon, Granada Learning C2k consultant, to develop mathematical challenges. C2k provided Blackboard as the online environment and the pupils undertook a wide range of activities over several weeks.

They followed a treasure trail through the Internet, creating questions for their teachers to solve. Using digital cameras they captured solutions to practical pattern block activities and shared them electronically with pupils from other schools. They became "Sherlock Holmes", solving crimes with an online database of eye-witness statements.

Rosemary Lee, teacher from Ballymena Primary, saw the advantages;

"the project was extremely worthwhile as more-able pupils are often not challenged enough or given opportunities to develop beyond their comfort zone. I also liked the fact that it was not just one pupil working on his/her own. With a paired arrangement, both pupils were able to learn from and complement each other".

In all activities there was a good balance and blend of both numeracy and ICT.

Pupils undertook an online investigation into similarity and growth patterns using virtual manipulatives to challenge their thinking.

Alan Boucher of Glencraig Integrated noted;

"initially the pupils raced through the activities but this pace slowed as the level of difficulty rose; just as one would expect. There was a need for the teacher to dedicate some classroom time to the children involved but this was manageable in a classroom where group activities are the norm".

In an exciting, real-time online competition, the pupils solved a dominoes investigation, successfully developing teamwork and a methodical approach.

Martin Daly of Primate Dixon in Coalisland felt that his;

"children were highly motivated by the hands-on, practical dimensions of the activities and by the sense that others would see the results. They eventually came around to developing a collaborative approach to the work."

Rosemary Lee comments further;

"the task which I felt was most challenging for the pupils was … where they had to interact with each other to collect data and present it in graphical form. It required them to be fairly independent in terms of making choices about what needed to be done and how".

kids say!
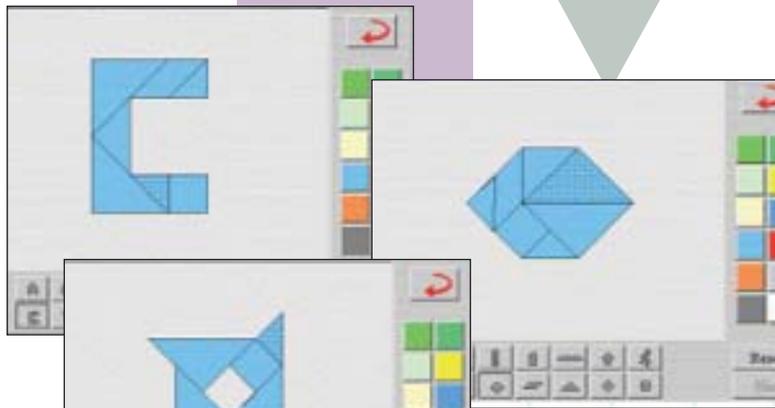
I enjoyed the Who Dunnit activity most, working out the identity of different people who committed crimes.

Catherine from Pennyburn

The best thing about being involved in the course was the different challenges and working with people from other schools.

Rachel from Ballymena

My favourite activity was the online quiz and it was great being involved in the course because I got to learn new things about maths and have fun at the same time.

Casey from Pennyburn

We enjoyed creating our homepage … because we had the opportunity to tell the others about ourselves. We enjoyed getting to do different things… working with practical things and on the computer. By being involved in the course we learned how to organise ourselves and work step-by-step to solve problems.

Anna & Peter from Glencraig

Online early professional development for special education teachers

It's Symbol… when you know how!

It's a challenge being a new teacher anywhere but special educational needs teachers, working with children with moderate and severe learning difficulties, need very specialised advice and support. This is not always easy to get quickly, especially when the problems they face need a rapid response.

As a pilot project, advisory officers in three Boards: Belfast, South Eastern and North Eastern – through the Special Needs Working Group – joined with Norma Price, the Granada Learning/C2k Special Needs specialist, to establish an online community of sharing practitioners, using the Learnwise VLE (Virtual Learning Environment).

Three or four times a week 18 beginning teachers from 11 special schools and units, interacted, shared, questioned and supported each other in online forums. The mutual support helped them to reflect, analyse, share and celebrate their work with their colleagues, and to improve their practice as a result.

What's more, their reaction was highly positive:

"The course provided good focus, direction and support… and was very enjoyable."

In just six weeks, more than 600 messages had been posted online, with teachers sharing advice on everything from handling difficult behaviours to developing suitable resources.

As one teacher said:

"The VLE is a valuable source of support and encouragement for teachers who are in similar situations."

The teachers also worked together to create multimedia classroom resources, using PowerPoint, which would be suited for special needs. They all shared their unfinished work online; feedback and suggestions from peers helped them to fine-tune and improve their resources.

Teachers learnt that, in the online environment, the more you put in, the more you get back. The success of the pilot has led to discussions about how this service can be extended next year.

More examples can be seen on http://c2kschoolbox.granada-learning.com/EPD/EPD1_2005 or email: Norma.Price@granadamedia.com

"Writing With Symbols" is on C2k systems in every school.

For children with moderate learning difficulties making sense of key words, even in reading schemes like Wellington Square, is a real challenge; inhibiting their comprehension of the text, depressing their self-esteem and their motivation to read and learn.

Now, classroom assistant Yvonne Cunning and teacher Margaret Rooney at Limegrove Special School in Limavady have used simple but innovative software, *Writing With Symbols*, to create sets of symbol-supported word lists, tailored to help each child. Yvonne made symbol booklets of keywords for every book in the series.

The attractive little booklets, which they keep discretely at their desks, have encouraged pupils to learn new, more difficult, words – they no longer give up with embarrassment.

The result so impressed one of the 11 year-old pupils that she suggested that they could help with writing as well as reading, and that's exactly what they are now doing; like all good ideas, it's simple, yet extremely effective.

It's a great example of how tools like *Writing With Symbols* can be used easily to create more positive and motivating learning. It is something that everyone can do; the software can be installed on any computer. As one pupil said:

It's symbol when you know how!

More information about training and support can be found in the Special Needs section of:

http://c2kschoolbox.granada-learning.com

or email: **Lisa.Brown@granadamedia.com**

> **"It's almost like having a portable classroom"**

Marie Patton, who teaches a class of seventeen Year 13 girls GCE Applied ICT at St Cecilia's College, Derry, uses a virtual learning environment to set weekly objectives, upload tasks and teaching materials;

"I have found the VLE an invaluable teaching tool; I am able to track, monitor and assess my students efficiently. The pupils are able to upload their completed tasks onto the VLE, where I am able to mark the work and give comments. It's almost like having a portable classroom".

Marie is one of 22 teachers and 385 pupils whose practice has been transformed through a blended use of traditional classroom work and self-study, supported online. In AVCE courses, where ICT expertise is at a premium, teachers in all five board areas are working together to develop online courses to enhance teaching and learning and expand the choice of subjects available to pupils.

As part of a pilot support project, teachers worked with advisory officers in the Southern and Belfast Boards and experts from local industries, using digital cameras and editing software, to generate digital resources - learning objects - to explore the complex role of ICT functions inside local organisations. Then 'e-text-books' and online resources from the CISCO Academy and Atomic Learning were added. Teachers undertook a one-week online professional development

course to enhance their own online teaching skills and to become accredited CISCO Academy trainers.

Online communications extends the classroom, gives every pupil a voice, and encourages flexible study and independent learning, as well as team working.

"Everybody is on a level playing field, which allows those who may not normally contribute, because of class dynamics, to become fully involved in a virtual discussion," explains Nick Halligan, teacher from St. Ciaran's High School, Ballygawley.

"Synchronous discussions (in real time) were held in the evening. This enabled the students to discuss any difficulties they were having," says Paddy McElhinney, teacher at Our Lady's Grammar School, Newry.

According to Ciaran McCrumlish, Southern Board e-Learning Officer, the expectations of the project have been exceeded by the remarkable outcomes observed:

"Students and their teachers have demonstrated a willingness to embrace this emerging technology. Positive impact of the work has been clearly demonstrated in the quality of students' online interactions, and their desire to extend their collaborations with students from other schools".

To find out more about this project please contact:

ciaran.mccrumlish@selb.org

You can get other people's points of view on something that you are not sure of; it is easy to hand in our work online (even) if we are off school.

Laura

It helps me to resolve any problems I have when doing my assignments via discussions

Deynah

I also like that if you are having a problem you can ask your friends instead of having to go and ask the teacher!

Kimberley

It's a good way of communicating with the class about a piece of work and of getting feedback from the teacher.

Carla

You Decide ... Online!

You are faced with a major decision! Do you grant planning permission for more aquaculture, fish-farming, in an unspoiled Ulster lough?

It's a big issue with strong economic and environmental arguments – not to mention emotions – on both sides. You are given online access to a wide range of written material, video interviews, photographs, maps and websites and must come to a decision and write a report in 10 days. This is the task that faced some 485 students and 26 teachers from 15 schools who have participated in the online advanced level "Geography Decision Making Exercise" pilot project.

The online activity demands high-order skills to absorb and understand the issues, marshal the arguments and structure a professional report. It has all the demands of the original paper-based activity, but includes video clips and a wide range of multimedia. In addition, the online environment provides a range of communication tools: online forums and digital file exchange, to allow collaboration between the groups of four students from the paired schools, who work together at the heart of the project. Both the decision-making process and the collaborative product are assessed by a team of CCEA examiners and each student gets individual feedback.

Because it is online, explaining their arguments clearly to each other and engaging with the issue is much more demanding for the students, and leads to greater understanding.

"The fact that we were grouped with another school gave us an incentive to work hard and to complete the activity successfully,"

says Ann Blackhall, a student from Assumption Grammar, Ballynahinch.

The discussions displayed high levels of geographical skills, as well as evidence of peer mentoring and effective group work. Students regularly accessed the materials at all hours of the day from 8.00 am right up to 3.00am next morning!

"I find the written exercise very tedious sometimes but this format was exciting and interactive. The opportunity to present our work on PowerPoint was an added bonus,"

explains Ann McLoughlin, another student at Assumption Grammar.

Their teacher Mary Wells Head of Geography, agrees,

"… our Department have seen this initiative as a wonderful opportunity for our 'A' Level students … they have benefited from ICT skills and they have gained knowledge of how to structure a report … it has no doubt enhanced their academic performance but the social skills acquired have also been beneficial … we were delighted to have taken part."

The Online Geography Decision Making Exercise pilot project is well tested; it has run 11 times, in close collaboration with CCEA, and will move from the Blackboard environment to LNI in the autumn of 2005.

For more information, contact Stephen Roulston at C2k on sroulston@c2kni.org.uk

Saving Lives Online

The consequences of excessive speed

Our teenagers have the worst accident record in the UK, and in an attempt to tackle this issue an online education programme, developed by the PSNI, will be available next year in LearningNI, for your sixth form pastoral programme.

Digital video tells the online story of an serious road traffic accident, from the perspective of the professionals who arrive on the scene, the Road Policing Service, the Fire Fighting Service, the Emergency and Paramedic Services and the Road Trauma Support Unit. The professionals engage online with the sixth-formers in 'hot seat' debates.

"We are shown the reality in the video clips and understand the dangers from talking to the experts" (Pupil)

Look out for 'Right to Drive… Right to Life', PSNI teacher resources pack in your school and email Eleanore Thomas at ethomas@c2kni.org.uk if you want to go online.

ICT dissolving boundaries

We all live in a global village - rolls off the tongue with ease, but what are the implications, if any, for the school curriculum and classroom practice? Developing an understanding of the opportunities for "enhanced connectedness" that technology can offer is one requirement for meaningful "village life", as is the promotion of communication and collaboration skills - whether home or abroad – which has been a feature of the learning experiences of children since 1986, when a farsighted project introduced European Studies to the curriculum.

Roger Austin, head of the School of Education at the University of Ulster, first director of European Studies, is now co-director of the Dissolving Boundaries project, supported by C2k, and works with the pupils and teachers from 177 project schools, north and south of the border, to help them learn together online, and come to a better understanding of difference: social, cultural, political and religious.

Evaluation of this project has shown that 87% of teachers agree that pupils' ICT skills improved, and 83% think that their communication skills are better. 80% believe that video conferencing made a difference to building community and friendship, and 63% report that the project made a significant or better impact on mutual understanding. The cooperation between teachers provides a broader resource base, mutual support and a growing sense for teachers that they too belong to a larger professional community, beyond the staff room.

Angela Rickard, from the Education Department of the National University of Ireland at Maynooth, the project's co-director, describes the range of primary, secondary and special schools project contexts as;

"historical, environmental, geological, political, editorial, graphical, legal, mathematical, technological, scientific, social scientific, linguistic, Hispanic, Gaelic, poetic, heroic – and all completely fantastic."

This year's online projects are wide-ranging; the plantation of Ulster, the Reformation, myths and legends, recycling to protect the environment, computer-aided technology design, learning sign-languages, poetry, art and teaching Spanish.

Further information can be found at **www.dissolvingboundaries.org and at www.european-studies.org**

Kore wa nan desu ka

From left to right: Aidin Collins – Friends' School, Gerry Crossan – St Brigid's, Derry, Lyndsay O'Brien – Boys' Model and Rita Jordan – St Colman's Newry

Using new technologies to establish contacts and promote connectedness extends well beyond our immediate horizons. A simple Japanese question, Kore wa nan desu ka (what is it?), lies at the heart of a Japanese Studies programme which has linked schools in Northern Ireland with partner schools in Japan. The question captures our enduring curiosity for Japanese culture and vice-versa. Through live video and text conferences and bulletin boards, pupils, from forty schools here, have shared and examined cultural artefacts - Japanese bean curd, sushi, green tea, the kimono - and events, such as Sumo, kite festivals, the tea ceremony, with their peers in Toyama Prefecture, on the Japan Sea coast of central Honshu. Pupils are inquisitive, demanding explanations from each other about cultural differences. The Japanese are keen to learn English; "internationalisation" is key to their curriculum.

The programme was inaugurated in 1991 by the Imperial Prince of Japan sending an email during his visit to Belfast and has run for so long that one of the teachers involved today, Lyndsay O'Brien, at the Boys' Model in Belfast, learnt Japanese as a pupil at Belfast Royal Academy. In her school, the boys do calligraphy and origami and try sushi after school.

For Gerry Crossan at St Brigid's High School in Derry, building up confidence amongst pupils to express themselves clearly online, especially when oral expression in their own language is a difficulty for some, is another good reason to be involved.

Pupils produce digital videos about Ulster culture for their linked schools. They share school websites by using Babel Fish on Yahoo to translate Japanese into English.

Support from the Japan Foundation, the GB Sasakawa Foundation, the British Council and the Regional Training Unit has enabled teachers to teach in each other's schools and plan the curriculum.

Contact David Farrell at Ballyclare Secondary School for details: Rdfarrell@aol.com

Star Gazing in Class

It's is another dreary Belfast afternoon, but David Brattle's GCSE class at Methodist College are totally absorbed in the study of the Jovian Giant, Jupiter and the spectacular Crab Nebula. The class are steering a multi-million dollar, research-quality telescope, perched on the Haleakalā summit of Maui in Hawaii, around the Pacific night sky. Fantasy?   No, fact.

Northern Ireland has the highest proportion of schools in the UK who take robotic remote control, through the Internet, of one of two Faulkes telescopes (the other is in New South Wales), built by British software millionaire, Dill Faulkes, for use by pupils.

Some of the available key stage 2 - 4 and

A Level maths and science projects include tracking near-earth asteroids, imaging galaxies and studying gamma-ray bursts - the most violent explosions in the Universe.   Further details at www.faulkes-telescope.com

According to Robert Hill, Faulkes Coordinator at the Armagh Planetarium it is planned that schools will join up with their peers across Europe for shared investigations.

"We are encouraging pupil research links to entice our next generation into science, technology and engineering disciplines, using state-of-the-art multimedia resources".

Robert can be contacted at www.armaghplanet.com/html/education.htm

PRSD:
A New Opportunity?

"in keeping with the concept of professional integrity assume responsibility for their ongoing professional development as an essential expression of their professionalism."

" promote collegiality among colleagues by respecting their professional standing and opinions and, in that spirit, be prepared to offer advice and assistance…"

The aims of PRSD are set out in the agreed scheme documentation. A perusal of these aims clearly indicates that, in addition to the core purpose of enhancing the quality of education, the main thrust of the scheme is professional development. There is specific reference to the support of teachers in their professional development and career progression, and a further reference to increasing teachers' participation in decision-making and career planning and additionally developing in teachers, a greater sense of control over their work.

These aims resonate with the stance taken by the Council in respect of staff development. However, if we are to realise these aims within the PRSD processes, then it follows that those participating must have some common understanding as to what is deemed to constitute professional competence, and as importantly how such competence might be developed over the course of a professional working-life. In addition to this, there is an equally obvious need to have an understanding as to the possible developmental pathways available to teachers.

As you will be aware GTCNI has been engaged in the last year in a review, not only of the competences framework underpinning teaching, but also of Continuing Professional Development. The Council's deliberations on these issues has been reported to the Department of Education(DE) and will form the basis of on-going work within the education service, designed to ensure that Northern Ireland continues to enjoy the benefits of a teaching force that is highly skilled and motivated. An appropriate PRSD process, predicated upon the principles set out in that report, would play a major part in sustaining the excellent standards of teachers in Northern Ireland. GTCNI considers that it is imperative that the new PRSD process should be informed by the findings of its report, and to that end will make available, on the web, core elements namely:

- **the draft list of teacher competences; and**

- **the proposed developmental framework of extended competences.**

The Council sees these as essential in informing the initial discussions between reviewee and reviewer, and also informing individuals in their personal reflection and identification of needs and objectives. The fact that all participants have access to an agreed framework should do much to create the circumstances that will engender a sense of trust, confidence and transparency, essential to the successful implementation of the scheme. The current guidance on PRSD makes reference to the Standards for Headteachers in Northern Ireland, and this in itself reflects a commitment to the notion of competences and standards as tools to aid reflection and discussion. Since the publication of that guidance the Council's report has come into the public domain and the Regional Training Unit will now include the core elements of that report on their PRSD website.

The PRSD process will also be informed by other considerations such as School Development Plans, and where appropriate, Inspection Reports or personal career plans. What is clear is that success, in respect of PRSD, requires the development of a collegiate culture and a commitment to developing dynamic professional communities characterised by openness, shared practice and a commitment to life-long learning. That said, success also requires that the education service is structured in such a way as to facilitate ready access to coherent, well resourced developmental CPD programmes and that is a challenge for all who seek to support teachers in their work.

Whilst appropriate external facilities are important in expediting PRSD the reality is that the development needs of many teachers can be addressed informally, through personal reflection or a range of other activities, which facilitate shared practice and co-operative working. The Council's report to DE on CPD lists a wide range of development activities that contribute to the enhancement of our professional knowledge and understanding including:

- **action research;**

- **engagement in curriculum development;**

- **academic study;**

- **mentoring or job coaching;**

- **participation in pilot study programmes;**

- **distance-learning or participation in online joint reflection; and**

- **personal portfolio building.**

This is by no means an exhaustive list but is intended to illustrate that CPD has many facets and PRSD, if it is to be truly developmental, must be implemented in a way that facilitates reflection, encourages a sharing of knowledge and recognises the rich diversity of professional interests.

As part of its on-going work the Council will continue to explore with all partners how teachers can be supported in their professional development and engagement in life-long learning.