

The future is bright for National Learning Network as it embarks on a major period of development that will result in a significant broadening both of its client base and the programmes it offers

Network Development

The National Learning Network has been given the green light for an ambitious five year strategic development plan including the establishment of a new Institute of Higher Education.

Ground-breaking programmes will also be launched serving a broad spectrum of marginalised groups under the blueprint which covers the period up to the end of 2010.

Overall it is projected that there will be significant growth both in the depth and breadth of services offered in coming years following the implementation of the new initiatives, while combined numbers in vocational and rehabilitative training at centres around the country will also move above the 2,500 mark.

“We have enjoyed unrivalled success over a period of many years in delivering life-changing programmes to people with disabilities,” said National Learning Network’s acting chief executive, Joe O’Brien. “Today we can boast a progression rate of 85 per cent of those completing their programmes moving into jobs, or higher education and training. That compares very favourably with any other programmes that are available.”

“But now, as part of the process of becoming a mainstream provider of education, training and employment access programmes, we want our successful services and systems to make a difference to more people across a wider range of social need in Ireland.”

According to director of business development, Jane Forman, the setting up of the new Institute of Higher Education signals a serious move by National Learning Network into adult and continuing learning where the

focus is on providing training to those who work with people with disabilities, rather than just disabled people themselves.

The Institute is due to be operational by next Spring and during 2006 will deliver three day continuous professional development modules to some 270 people. Initially there will be eight modules on offer: Introduction to Mental Health; Specific Learning Disabilities (SPLDs); Skills for Trainers; Assessment Practice; Managing SPLD in the Classroom Environment; Boundary Management; QA in the Training Centre; and Mental Health Advocacy – Communication with Service Users.

It is envisaged that once the initiative is up and running, it will be possible to offer FETAC certified programmes by combining modules, whilst depending on the success of the Institute degree courses could be offered.

Said Ms Forman: “At present this is a virtual Institute – it has no physical home. This might change in time, but we have to learn to walk before we can run, to build on expe-

Below: Minister for Finance, Brian Cowen TD, at the official launch of National Learning Network with Joe O’Brien, acting chief executive, National Learning Network.





rience and to build expertise organically. Additionally, the current arrangements enable us to deliver courses where the demand is, anywhere in Ireland.”

Meanwhile, a range of new project initiatives is being developed in many areas of unmet need. These include: new mental health programmes; supports to FÁS centres; workshops and apprentices; the extension of services offered by BUA in the area of specific learning disabilities; the training of trainers; disability support services; the development of assessment services; and multi-cultural and diversity training, as well as the utilisation of centres outside normal hours.

One new programme that’s about to get underway is called Home Focus - a service that will help people with mental health difficulties to lead more independent lives and to access their communities better, as well as improving their health and social well being. Funded by the Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform to the tune of €378,000 and delivered in people’s own homes, the service is a partnership between National Learning Network and West Cork Mental Health Services, the Institute of Mental Health Recovery, the Guidance Services of the HSE, West Cork Community Partnership and Workstart West Cork.

In addition to the huge work that has gone into the development of new projects, National Learning Network has undergone a major re-branding programme which resulted in a change of name from NTDI to better reflect the organisation in the future. This, along with a fresh new look for the organisation, reflected in signage currently being rolled out nationwide, will have a significant impact on how the organisation is viewed, according to Mr O’Brien.

“National Learning Network is in great shape – both in terms of its people and its programmes – to have a bigger impact than ever on the lives of people at the margins of Irish society,” he declared.

“We will continue to develop world class services for our core client group with the help of our partners, particularly in FÁS and the HSE. But we will also be able to widen this client base both within the world of disability and for people in other areas, such as recovering drug users and victims of brain injury.

“In addition, we will help to further professionalise service delivery in the disability sector and beyond through training programmes for those working with people with disabilities and with other socially disadvantaged groups.”



Former US President Bill Clinton pictured delivering the keynote address at the RehabCare Gala Banquet to raise funds for suicide prevention

RehabCare Welcomes Suicide Prevention Strategy

National Strategy for
Action on Suicide
Prevention 'single
most important
initiative ever relating
to suicide prevention'

RehabCare has welcomed the Government's National Strategy for Action on Suicide Prevention as the single most important initiative ever relating to suicide prevention in Ireland.

The organisation – which has enlisted the support of former US President Bill Clinton in its suicide prevention campaign – will now concentrate its resources on helping to deliver on the aims of the Strategy.

RehabCare chief executive Angela Kerins said the Strategy represented a strong framework for action to tackle the escalating suicide crisis among young people in Ireland.

"This plan is action focused and it provides a genuine role for any group or organisation which is working to remove the pain that suicide is bringing to communities throughout Ireland.

"The response from all of these disparate stakeholders must now be to end the fragmentation which has hindered efforts to develop a co-ordinated national strategy by all groups working together in consultation with the National Office for Suicide Prevention."

Ms Kerins said she particularly welcomed the integrated approach to tackling suicide, as evidenced by specific proposals for liaison between Government Departments. It was also crucial that the Government has recognised the necessity for the allocation of more realistic funding to suicide prevention.

"This Strategy contains many of the responses that we have been advocating for a long time and we congratulate all those involved. Now we must all start delivering real results for vulnerable young people."



Top Irish model, Glenda Gilson celebrates the launch of Ireland's first online bingo site, www.rehabbingo.com

Glenda Goes Online for Rehab

Top model Glenda Gilson is fronting an ambitious bid by Rehab Lotteries to break in to the €150 million global online bingo business.

The Dublin beauty is the face of Ireland's first online bingo site, RehabBingo.com, which aims to attract players from as far apart as the US and Japan to help finance Rehab's community based training, education, employment and social care services.

Glenda, whose glamorous relationship with Irish rugby captain Brian O'Driscoll continues to fill the nation's gossip columns, has also participated in a major promotion with the Irish Daily Star to kickstart the new site.

Irish internet users - particularly young women - and regular visitors to the hundreds of traditional bingo halls around the country are particularly being targeted by the Rehab Lotteries initiative which aims to raise €1 million over the next five years.

Said Rehab Lotteries managing director, Dr John McGuire: "Bingo has always been a hugely popular method of charity fundraising in Ireland and we believe that the online version of the game can become a major contributor to developing Rehab services throughout Ireland.

"It is estimated that more than five million people play online bingo around the world each day and just capturing a fraction of that market, on top of those playing in

Ireland, would make this a very successful enterprise."

Dr McGuire added that around three quarters of regular online bingo players at present are women despite the fact that up to now they had very little involvement in an online gaming market which is now worth €2 billion a year in Ireland alone. Studies also show that where online bingo is concerned, the main motivation for playing is entertainment as opposed to gambling.

"Revenue from our bingo site will enable Rehab to keep developing new services that keep pace with the changing needs and wishes of the people who use our services."

