An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Creative Clusters: A Collaborative approach to Cultivating Creativity in Schools

School Excellence Fund – Creative Clusters Initiative

Research and Evaluation Report

Dr. Dorothy Morrissey (Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick)

Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Creative Clusters is a pilot initiative of the Government of Ireland's Department of Education (DoE). The initiative provides opportunities for clusters of schools to come together to experiment, innovate and collaborate on the design, implementation and evaluation of bespoke arts and creative learning projects. In this way, Creative Clusters seeks to promote new ways of collaboration between schools, and between schools and the arts and cultural sectors. These collaborations are designed to improve teaching and learning, and to enable learners and teachers to develop their creativity.

Creative Clusters is funded through the Government of Ireland's School Excellence Fund, a fund dedicated to encouraging and supporting local collaboration and innovation in Ireland's schools. Creative Clusters is led by the DoE in partnership with Education Support Centres Ireland (ESCI), a national network of 21 full-time local Centres. At national level, the initiative is managed by the National Arts in Education Administrative Office at the Education Centre, Tralee, under the direction of the DoE's National Director for the Integration of the Arts in Education, and the Director of the Education Centre, Tralee. Applications from individual schools, existing networks of schools and potential school clusters are submitted to the local Centres.

This research and evaluation report focuses on the development of Creative Clusters over the pilot phase of the initiative in the academic years 2018/19 and 2019/20. (The pilot was extended into the first term of the 2020/21 academic year due to the school closures resulting from COVID-19.) In the academic year 2018/19, 23 clusters, comprising 71 schools, participated in Creative Clusters, with 68 of these schools continuing into the 2019/20 academic year. In 2019/20, a further 21 clusters, comprising 76 schools, were added. The clusters contained between two and five schools, and were comprised of primary schools only, post-primary schools only, and a combination of both primary and post-primary schools.

Creative Clusters: Supports and structures

The following supports are provided by Creative Clusters:

- Paid substitution cover for nominated teachers in participating schools to attend a Regional Cluster Training Day and Creative Cluster meetings
- A financial grant to cover the costs of materials and personnel

- A designated external **Creative Cluster Facilitator**, who is appointed by and reports to the local Education Support Centre. The Facilitator arranges cluster meetings at the Centre, identifies local, regional and national opportunities to engage with creativity and culture, and supports teachers to draw on their own skills. (Teachers in full-time employment in schools cannot be Creative Cluster Facilitators.)

The lead school in the cluster selects a **Creative Cluster Coordinator** as the main point of contact for participating schools and the Creative Cluster Facilitator. The Coordinator is responsible for the day-to-day running of the cluster project.

Each of the other schools in the cluster selects a **Nominated School Representative** to lead the project within their schools.

Research and evaluation

The research and evaluation process was designed to evaluate the development of the initiative over its pilot phase, and focused on:

- The experiences of teachers and learners
- The impact on teaching and learning of participation in Creative Clusters
- The use of the cluster model
- The approaches used within and between clusters to integrate with the objectives of the Creative Youth Plan
- The provision of recommendations for the future development of Creative Clusters

A combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches was employed to best capture the complexities of the initiative and the various roles and responsibilities within it. Even though aspects of the process were delayed or reformulated due to the school closures resulting from COVID-19, the planned focus of the research and evaluation was maintained. Since the research was carried out by a lecturer in Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, ethical approval for the project, and the ensuing changes, was received from Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee (MIREC).

The following research and data collection methods were used:

- Document analysis of national and international policy and research and documentation on the initiative itself
- Online questionnaires distributed to the following participant cohorts:

- o Participating teachers (including principals)
- o Creative Cluster Facilitators
- o Education Centre Directors
- o Telephone interviews
  - o Education Centre Directors (4)
  - o Creative Cluster Facilitators (4)
- o Learner research tasks administered by teachers across 7 schools
- o Cost-benefit analysis

Main findings

The main findings of the research and evaluation are summarised below under the following headings:

- o The cluster model
- o Teaching, learning and the inclusion of pupil voice
- o Collaborations between formal and informal education sectors
- o Range of creative activities
- o Embedding the creative process
- o Opportunities for teacher Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

The cluster model

As a national initiative comprised of local projects, Creative Clusters holds enormous potential for embedding creativity in Ireland's schools. The ESCI's national network of Education Support Centres has considerable experience in the local administration of national projects and is ideally positioned to provide the leadership and administrative support necessary to ensure the smooth running of the initiative. However, the issue of high Director turnover needs to be addressed to ensure maximum efficiency in this regard. ESCI's leadership, the provision of funding and training, and the allocation of time, space and substitution cover for cluster meetings were key enablers in the effective functioning of the initiative. However, the scarcity of available substitute teachers posed significant challenges. The appointment of skilled Creative Cluster Facilitators, and the nomination of Creative Cluster Coordinators and Nominated School Representatives were also key to the effective functioning of Creative Clusters. School principals too, had an important role to play. Significantly, the cluster model enabled the formation of Professional Learning Communities or PLCs, within which teachers

shared expertise and engaged in critically reflective dialogue around common problems on an on-going basis. These PLCs enabled teachers to experience a self-directed approach to professional learning which also functioned as a model for prioritising pupil voice in classrooms and schools.

Teaching, learning and the inclusion of pupil voice

Participation in Creative Clusters facilitated teachers to develop a wide range of creative pedagogies, to engage in sustained reflective practices, to learn new skills and to engage in collaborative problem solving on an on-going basis. The opportunities afforded by Creative Clusters to extend learning opportunities beyond classrooms and schools into communities also had a positive impact on teacher and pupil learning and creativity. As teachers moved out of their comfort zones, took risks, became more self-directed and more comfortable with uncertainty, they encouraged their pupils to do likewise. Indeed, the centrality of pupil voice was one of the most successful features of the initiative.

Collaborations between formal and informal education sectors

Aligning with the Creative Youth Plan, Creative Clusters extended the range of activities in which pupils engaged to include a broad spectrum of activities across a wide range of subjects and curriculum areas. Such broad ranging engagement was grounded in the opportunities enabled by Creative Clusters for collaboration within schools, between schools, and with the informal education sector. These collaborations enabled teachers and pupils to extend learning opportunities beyond classrooms and schools into communities, while simultaneously enabling them to develop their repertoire of creative skills. The finance and dedicated out of school time for meetings provided by Creative Clusters were key enablers in this regard. Additionally, Creative Clusters enabled more formal opportunities for sharing expertise via Continuing Professional Development (CPD) events, involving personnel from the informal education sector, Creative Cluster Facilitators and teachers themselves.

Range of creative activities

The creative activities in which participants engaged extended beyond the arts to include: wellbeing, the environment, STEM, STEAM, and local history. Just over 12% of the projects completed over the course of the pilot phase focused exclusively on one or more of the arts. Many projects, nevertheless, included arts components, while some projects did not fit into any broad category. The opportunities afforded by Creative Clusters for collaboration within

and between schools, and with arts and cultural organisations, enabled engagement in such a broad range of activities. Many of these activities also developed and changed over time, and in response to the restrictions imposed due to COVID-19. Participating in these varied activities, teachers and pupils developed a range of creative skills, including: collaborative and teamwork skills, listening skills, observational skills, IT skills, appreciation skills, and artistic skills. While many of these skills were project/subject specific, others were more generic and, thereby, more obviously transferable. Teachers and pupils also learnt to appreciate both creative processes and creative products, and they learnt to value mistakes as key drivers for learning.

Embedding the creative process

The success of the Creative Clusters model in embedding the creative process in schools is highly dependent on the skill of the Creative Cluster Facilitator and/or the Creative Cluster Coordinator. It is also highly dependent on teacher commitment, which is supported by the opportunities for collaboration and professional learning afforded by the initiative. However, the single most significant enabler when it comes to embedding the creative process in schools is the commitment, support and drive of the school principal.

Opportunities for teacher CPD

Creative Clusters excels as a model of teacher CPD. The initiative is predicated on the formation of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) comprised of clusters of schools focused on a common concern. As a model of teacher CPD, Creative Clusters is aligned with best practice internationally, with the Creative Youth Plan, and with Ireland's Teaching Council's framework for teacher professional learning. The effectiveness of the initiative's PLCs is attested to by the extent to which they enabled teachers to collaboratively articulate shared concerns and goals and to engage in sustained reflective dialogue. Within these PLCs too, teachers co-constructed knowledge, shared expertise, developed creative pedagogies, learned new skills, took risks, and learned to tolerate uncertainty. In this way, Creative Clusters enabled teachers to develop the creative dispositions they were expected to cultivate in their pupils. Teachers' understanding of creativity was extended beyond the arts to include all subjects and everyday activities, and beyond creative products to include creative processes as well. Perhaps, most significantly, the PLCs functioned as models for the learning communities that teachers could (and did) replicate in and beyond their classrooms and

schools. The almost exclusive focus on practice within PLCs, however, generated a theory deficit. Since sustainable changes in practice are most effectively achieved through the integration of theory and practice, this deficit needs to be addressed.

Recommendations

Recommendations for the future development of Creative Clusters centre on three key areas:

- The cluster model
- Training and professional development
- Research and evaluation

The cluster model

- The DoE needs to continue to prioritise and provide funding for Creative Clusters.
- The DoE needs to support the maintenance of existing clusters – and develop new ones – to ensure that changes in teaching practice are sustained, and creative processes become embedded in schools.
- The DoE needs to ensure an adequate supply of substitute teachers at local level.
- The ESCI network is best placed to facilitate Creative Clusters regionally and locally, though the issue of Director turnover needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency.
- The ESCI network has a key role to play in advocating for the initiative and in securing the support of school leadership nationally, regionally, and locally.
- At local level, the Education Support Centre Director has a key role to play in selecting schools/clusters of schools, in nominating suitably skilled Creative Cluster Facilitators and in facilitating and overseeing collaborations with the informal education, arts and cultural sectors. The Director should, in certain circumstances, be enabled to nominate full-time teachers as Facilitators.
- The Creative Cluster Facilitator should *in exceptional circumstances,* and in consultation with the Education Centre Director and participating teachers, have discretion for flexibility in organising cluster meetings.
- At local level, the Education Support Centre Director should have a designated role in mediating cluster-level communication and other issues.

Training and professional development

- Regional Cluster Training Days for all participants should take place early in the academic year, with bespoke training being provided for school principals.
- Regional Cluster Training Days should ensure clarity for all participants on the nature of the initiative and the various roles and responsibilities inherent in it.
- Attendance at Training Days by school principals and at least one other teacher in participating schools should be a requirement for participation in the initiative.
- There is a need to consult with Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) to address the current deficit in theory and to investigate ways of embedding theory in ongoing teacher-teacher dialogue.
- Strong links with the non-formal education sector will enable opportunities for teacher professional development.

Research and evaluation

- Continuing research is required to inform future directions of the initiative.
- There is a need to conduct cluster case studies, over an extended period, to achieve in-depth insights into the development of clusters over time. Cluster case studies would also provide greater insight into the ways in which pupil voice is included over the life of a project, from the design stage through to the evaluation stage.

1. Introduction

Creative Clusters is a pilot initiative of the Government of Ireland's Department of Education (DoE). The purpose of the initiative is to demonstrate how the arts and creativity can support clusters of schools to work together to address common learning challenges. It was originally planned to run the pilot over two academic years, 2018/19 and 2019/20, but following the closure of schools in March 2020 due to COVID-19, the pilot was extended into the first term of the 2020/21 academic year.

Creative Clusters is led by the DoE in partnership with Education Support Centres Ireland (ESCI)[1]. The initiative is managed at national level by the National Arts in Education Administrative Office at the Education Centre, Tralee under the direction of the National Director for the Integration of the Arts in Education (Curriculum and Assessment Policy Unit (DoE), and the Director of the Education Centre, Tralee. Creative Clusters is funded through the School Excellence Fund – Creative Clusters Initiative, a Government of Ireland initiative dedicated to encouraging and supporting local collaboration and innovation in Ireland's schools.

1.1 Creative Clusters – aims

Creative Clusters aims to:

- Promote new ways of working and collaboration between schools and the arts and cultural sectors
- Improve teaching and learning
- Provide opportunities for clusters of schools to experiment, innovate and collaborate on the design, implementation and evaluation of bespoke arts and creative learning projects
- Develop the creativity of learners and teachers
- Understand if clustering schools at different stages of their journey in using the arts and creativity in the classroom and in developing longer term partnerships is an effective model for developing and embedding practice in schools (see Appendix A and Appendix B)

---

[1] ESCI was formerly known as the Association of Teachers'/Education Centres in Ireland (ATECI).

1.2 The role of Education Support Centres Ireland (ESCI)

The ESCI network is the 'backbone' organisation responsible for the oversight and administration of Creative Clusters. This national network comprises 21 full-time Education Support Centres, which are located as follows (see Figure 1):

- Region 1: Monaghan, Navan, Drumcondra (Dublin)

- Region 2: Blackrock (Dublin), Dublin West (Dublin), Kildare

- Region 3: Wexford, Waterford, Kilkenny

- Region 4: Cork, West Cork, Tralee, Limerick

- Region 5: Clare, Galway, Athlone, Laois

- Region 6: Donegal, Mayo, Sligo, Carrick-on-Shannon

Figure 1: ESCI regional map of Ireland
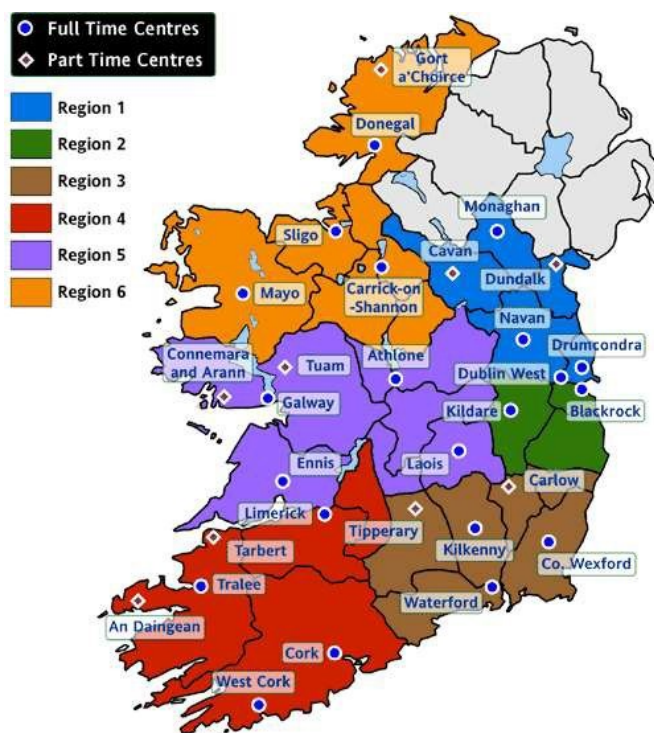
The administrative base for Creative Clusters is located at the National Arts in Education Administrative Office in the Education Centre, Tralee. The initiative is led locally by ESCI's full-time Centres. Individual schools, existing networks of schools and potential school clusters submit their applications to the local Centre where applications are assessed based on the following criteria:

- The rationale for the application

- Benefits to teaching and learning

- Capacity and commitment of all the schools in the cluster to participate

- Plans for the inclusion of children's/young people's voices (see Appendix A and Appendix B for further detail on these criteria).

1.3. Composition and reach

A Creative Cluster is comprised of between two and five schools. Each cluster of schools collaborates on the design, implementation, evaluation and dissemination of an innovative arts or creative learning project focused on addressing a shared issue or challenge. In the academic year 2018/19, 23 Implementer clusters, comprising 71 schools, participated in Creative Clusters. 68 of these schools continued into the 2019/20 academic year. (Three Implementer clusters withdrew from the initiative over the two-year period.) In 2019/20, a further 21 Adapter clusters (comprising 76 schools) were added. One Adapter was allocated to each of Ireland's 21 full-time Education Support Centres. Figure 1 shows the allocation of clusters by Education Support Centres across both academic years.

Figure 2: Allocation of clusters by Education Support Centres

Education Support Centre	18/19	19/20
Athlone Education Centre	0	1
Blackrock Education Centre, Dublin	3	4
Carrick-on-Shannon Education Centre, Leitrim	1	2
Clare Education Centre	3	4
Cork Education Support Centre	1	2
Donegal Education Support Centre	3	4
Drumcondra Education Support Centre, Dublin	2	3
Dublin West Education Centre	1	2
Galway Education Centre	0	1
Kildare Education Support Centre	0	1
Kilkenny Education Centre	1	2
Laois Education Centre	1	2
Limerick Education Centre	1	2
Mayo Education Centre	0	1
Monaghan Education Centre	0	1
Navan Education Centre	0	1
Sligo Education Centre	1	2
The Education Centre, Tralee	3	4
Waterford Teachers' Centre	1	2
West Cork Education Centre	1	2
Wexford Education Centre	0	1

Within each cluster, schools may be at different levels of competency in terms of creativity and the arts. Clusters may be composed of primary schools only, post-primary schools only or a combination of primary and post-primary schools. Of the 23 Implementers, 13 were comprised of primary schools only, three of post-primary schools only and seven of a combination of both. Of the 21 Adapters, 13 were comprised of primary schools only, one of post-primary schools only and seven of a combination of both (see Figure 2).

Figure 3: Composition of clusters by school type
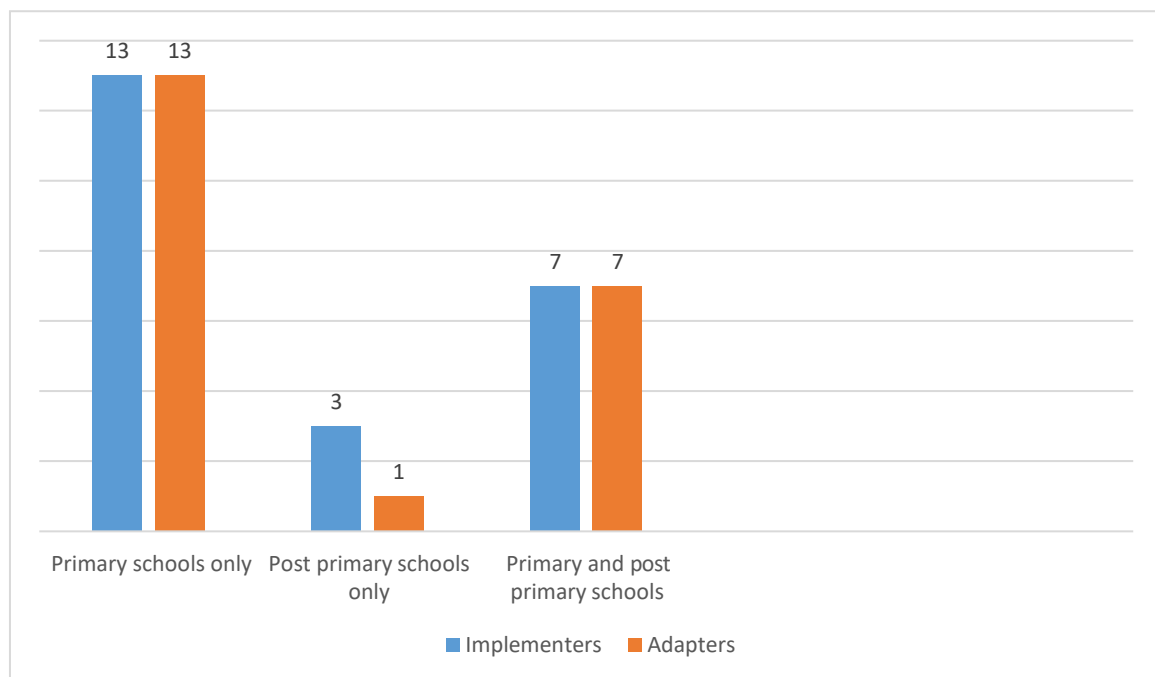
1.4. Supports

The following supports are provided to each Creative Cluster:

- Paid substitution cover for teachers in participating schools to attend a Regional Cluster Training Day and Creative Cluster meetings (see 1.6 and 1.7 for further detail)

- A Cluster financial grant[2]

- A designated Creative Cluster Facilitator

---

[2] In 2018/19, each Implementer cluster was allocated a maximum of 2,500 euro with each participating school expected to have a say in how it was spent. In 2019/20 each Implementer was allocated 1,000 euro per school. Adapter clusters were allocated 1,500 euro per school in 2019/20 and 2,500 euro per school in 2020/21.

1.5. The Creative Cluster Facilitator

The Creative Cluster Facilitator, for whom training is provided, supports the Cluster to develop, implement and evaluate its project/s. S/he is selected by, and reports to, the local Education Support Centre Director. The Facilitator works with the Cluster to identify local, regional, and national opportunities to engage with the arts, creativity, and culture. S/he also supports teachers and schools to draw on their own skills and experiences. The Facilitator organises and facilitates three Cluster meetings in Year 1 and two Cluster meetings in Year 2 in the local Education Support Centre. After the first meeting of each year, s/he submits the Cluster's Planning Model Document (see Appendix C for template) to the local Centre.

1.6 The Creative Cluster Coordinator

A Creative Cluster is led by a designated lead school and one of its teachers (normally a member of the school leadership team) is nominated as Creative Cluster Coordinator or Lead School Coordinator[3]. The Creative Cluster Coordinator is responsible for the day-to-day running of the project and is the main point of contact for participating schools and their Creative Cluster Facilitator. S/he and at least one teacher representative from each of the other schools attend an initial Regional Cluster Training Day early in the academic year. These training days are held in the following locations:

- Dublin (Region 1)
- Kildare (Region 2)
- Kilkenny (Region 3)
- Cork (Region 4)
- Laois (Region 5)
- Sligo (Region 6)

Creative Cluster Coordinators also attend three cluster meetings at their local Education Support Centres in Year 1 of their participation in the initiative and two in Year 2. Paid substitution is provided for Coordinators to attend Creative Cluster training and meetings. Additionally, substitution costs to the equivalent of one day per term (two terms) are paid for the Creative Cluster Coordinator to engage in further planning.

---

[3] In subsequent iterations of Creative Clusters, the title of Lead School Coordinator replaced that of Creative Cluster Coordinator in documentation from the initiative's administrative office. However, the latter is retained on the DoE website and is used in this report to provide a more accurate sense of the responsibilities attached to the role.

1.7 Nominated school representative

Each of the other schools in the Cluster nominates a representative to lead the project within their schools. Nominated school representatives attend the Regional Cluster Training Day and three cluster meetings at their local Education Support Centres in Year 1 of their school's participation in the initiative and two cluster meetings in Year 2. Paid substitution is also provided for the nominated school representative to attend meetings and Creative Cluster training.

1.8 Training

In the pilot phase of the initiative, Creative Cluster Facilitator training and Regional Cluster Training days were facilitated by Creativity Culture & Education (CCE), a UK based international foundation, which is:

> dedicated to transforming the learning experience of children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds around the world … [using] the power of creativity to unlock their potential for achievement, attainment and well-being by supporting the confidence and capability of the educators in their lives.

CCE currently operates in 11 countries, including Ireland where it is also involved with Creative Schools, an Arts Council of Ireland (ACI) led initiative, designed (like Creative Clusters) 'to develop and celebrate the arts and creativity in schools.'

1.9 Creativity

The first two decades of the 21st century have been marked by the development of a worldwide consensus on the importance of creativity in education (Vincent-Lancrin *et al,* 2019). Indeed, creativity has been identified by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (OECD-CERI) (*ibid.*) and the European Union (EU, European Commission, 2009) as essential for:

- Personal wellbeing and employability
- Economic and social development
- The functioning of 21st century democracies

According to Vincent-Lancrin *et al.* (2019) creativity and critical thinking have important roles to play in education and society. Indeed, critical thinking is, as illustrated below (see 1.9.1), integral to many definitions of creativity. The OECD, in *PISA 2021 Creative Thinking framework*

(OECD 2019), which is due to be finalised in 2022, combines creativity and critical thinking in the term 'creative thinking':

> *the competence to engage productively in the generation, evaluation and improvement of ideas, that can result in original and effective solutions, advances in knowledge and impactful expressions of imagination* (p.8, italics in original).

This definition of creative thinking is aligned with many of the definitions of creativity discussed below.

1.9.1 Defining creativity

OECD-CERI and EU policy on creativity is informed by the notion of creativity put forward by the UK's National Advisory Committee on Creativity Culture and Education (NACCCE, 1999). NACCCE defines creativity as:

> Imaginative activities fashioned so as to produce outcomes that are both original and of value.

NACCCE identifies four characteristics of creativity inherent in this definition:

- Using imagination
- Pursuing purposes
- Being original
- Judging value

These characteristics have been reformulated by Vincent-Lancrin *et al* (2019) as key dimensions (skills or habits) of creativity:

- Inquiring
- Imagining
- Doing
- Reflecting

Additionally, Vincent-Lancrin *et al* recognise novelty (being original) as a component of creativity. They also recognise, as does NACCCE (1999), that creativity can be learnt, and that it can be practised collaboratively as well as individually. Yet, despite much general agreement about the nature of creativity, it remains, as Cremin (2017, p.xx) puts it, 'a complex, elusive and differently understood and instantiated' concept (see also Vincent-Lancrin *et al* 2019).

1.9.2 Difficulties and dilemmas

While Vincent-Lancrin *et al* (2019) note that there are problems transferring the key dimensions of creativity into classrooms, they do not attempt to outline or interrogate these problems. Some of these difficulties are, however, identified by Cremin (2017) and can be summarised as follows:

- Conceptions of creativity as small-c (personal creativity) *and* Big-C (creativity that transforms a specific cultural domain e.g. Coco Chanel, Pablo Picasso etc.)[4]

- Creativity as a globalised *and* culturally specific phenomenon

- Creativity as domain generic (as a set of skills or habits than can be transferred from one domain (subject or context) to others) *and* creativity as domain specific

- Creative teaching *and* teaching for creativity

- The conflicting demands of imperatives to teach for creativity *and* imperatives exerted by international assessments in reading, maths, and science, such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)

- Individual *and* collaborative creativity

- Varying conceptions of creativity as cognitive, play-based, ubiquitous, *and* democratic

- Varying conceptions of creativity among teachers

- The persistence of myths of creativity as innate and the preserve of the arts.

1.9.3 The Five Creative Dispositions Model

Creative Clusters is underpinned by the conception of creativity outlined in The Five Creative Dispositions Model (see Figure 4).

---

[4] When it comes to creativity in education, Kaufman and Beghetto (2009) distinguish between 'mini-c creativity' (personal meaning-making), 'little-c creativity' (everyday creativity shared with others), and 'pro-c creativity' (professional creativity or the construction of professional knowledge and understanding).

Figure 4: The Five Creative Dispositions Model

1. Inquisitive

        Wondering and questioning

        Exploring and investigating

        Challenging assumptions

2.   Persistent

        Tolerating uncertainty

        Sticking with difficulty

        Daring to be different

3. Imaginative

        Playing with possibilities

        Making connections

        Using intuition

4. Disciplined

        Crafting and improving

        Developing techniques

        Reflecting critically

5. Collaborative

        Cooperating appropriately

        Giving and receiving feedback

        Sharing the 'product'

This model was developed by the Centre for Real World Learning at the University of Winchester from research commissioned by CCE (see 1.8) and the OECD-CERI (Lucas, Claxton and Spencer, 2013).

1.9.4 The Five Creative Dispositions Model and the rubrics developed for OECD-CERI

The Five Creative Dispositions Model is premised on a domain-generic understanding of creativity and has informed the development, by Vincent-Lancrin *et al* (2019), of OECD-CERI rubrics for creativity and critical thinking. Vincent-Lancrin *et al,* nevertheless, acknowledge that 'being creative … in one domain does not imply any transfer of those skills to another domain' (p.25). They contend, moreover, that creativity in any one domain requires domain-specific knowledge and expertise. Baer (2015; 2011), Marquis & Vajoczki (2012) and Csikszentmihalyi (2003) also reject domain-generic notions of creativity, arguing that the skills required for creativity are domain-specific. Nevertheless, Kaufman and Baer (2005) present a model of creativity that combines aspects of both, while Vincent-Lancrin *et al* (2019) advocate 'the nurturing of creativity … as part of the learning of specific disciplinary content knowledge' (p.25). So, in addition to developing domain-general rubrics for creativity and critical thinking, Vincent-Lancrin *et al* have developed domain-specific adaptations for music, science, maths, visual arts, and language arts.

1.10 Research and evaluation

The research and evaluation of Creative Clusters was designed to generate an understanding and evaluation of the development of the initiative over its pilot phase in the academic years 2018/19 and 2019/20. However, on 12th March 2020, Leo Varadkar (then Taoiseach), announced the closure of all schools, due to COVID-19. The schools remained closed for the rest of the academic year and the pilot was subsequently extended into the first term of the 2020/21 school year. This extension, though welcomed, added to the cocktail of challenges faced by schools in a new school year marked by the impact of a lengthy school closure and ongoing restrictions due to COVID-19. Many projects had to be adapted and reworked and many clusters did not return to their projects until after the mid-term break. Some did not return to them at all. Cluster meetings too shifted from Education Support Centres to online platforms (mainly ZOOM). Inevitably, the planned research and evaluation process was delayed and aspects of it too were reformulated (see 3). The original focus of the research and evaluation was, nevertheless, maintained, specifically as it related to:

- The experiences of teachers and learners
- The impact on teaching and learning of participation in Creative Clusters
- The use of the cluster model
- The approaches used within and between clusters to integrate with the objectives of the Creative Youth Plan (see 2.1)
- The provision of recommendations for the future development of Creative Clusters

2. Locating the Creative Clusters initiative

Creative Clusters is implicitly set within OECD and EU policy contexts. The initiative is also explicitly embedded in the Government of Ireland's Creative Ireland Programme.

2.1. The Creative Ireland Programme

The [Creative Ireland Programme](#) is a five-year Government initiative, 'from 2017 to 2022, which places creativity at the centre of public policy'. The Programme was launched in the final weeks of 1916 as a 'Legacy Programme' of the highly successful 'Ireland 2016', a Government of Ireland initiative comprised of thousands of cultural events to mark the 100th anniversary of the 1916 Rising, a seminal, though defeated, rebellion against British Rule in Ireland.

The Creative Ireland Programme is grounded in the vision 'that every person in Ireland should have the opportunity to realise their full creative potential'. In the Programme, creativity is defined as:

> a set of innate abilities and learned skills: the capacity of individuals and organisations to transcend accepted ideas and norms and by drawing on imagination to create new ideas that bring additional value to human activity.

This definition of creativity is clearly informed, like many of its predecessors, by that of NACCCE (1999) and it foregrounds both the learnt and collaborative dimensions of creativity.

The Creative Ireland Programme is built on five pillars:

- Enabling the Creative Potential of Every Child
- Enabling Creativity in Every Community
- Investing in our Creative and Cultural Infrastructure
- Ireland as a Centre of Excellence in Media Production
- Unifying our Global Reputation.

The Programme is also shaped around four key themes:

- Creative Youth
- Creative Communities
- Creative Places
- Creative Nation.

Creative Clusters is positioned within pillar one (Enabling the Creative Potential of Every Child) and theme one (Creative Youth) as a key, in-school initiative of the Creative Ireland Programme's Creative Youth Plan: *Creative Youth – A Plan to Enable the Creative Potential of Every Child and Young Person.*

2.2. The Creative Youth Plan

The Creative Youth Plan builds on the commitment made by Government in the Arts in Education Charter (2013) to place creativity 'at the heart of our future as a society and a country' (p.3). In keeping with the aims of the Creative Ireland Programme, the Plan extends the Charter's remit to encompass a 'broader range of creative activities' than the arts alone (Plan, p.9). It also posits a role for the arts 'not just as curricular subjects but as instruments for education more generally' (p.11). The commitment to dialogue and partnership (at national, regional. and local levels) outlined in the Charter is reiterated in the Creative Youth Plan and is, moreover, reflected in the constitution of Creative Clusters as a national programme of local projects.

'The long-term over-arching strategies' (p.38) or objectives informing the Creative Youth Plan are:

- Supporting collaboration between formal and non-formal approaches to creativity in education
- Extending the range of creative activities for our young people
- Embedding the creative process
- Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for teachers and artists

These strategies or objectives also inform Creative Clusters.

The Creative Youth Plan is, moreover, predicated on the centrality of the voice of children and young people, and recognises:

> that children and young people are not "beings in becoming" but are "citizens of today" with the right to be respected and heard during childhood, in their teenage years and in the transition to adulthood (p.24).

Accordingly, Creative Clusters emphasises:

- The centrality of the voice of the child
- Learner-learner collaboration

- Learner wellbeing
- Learner engagement in the design, development, and evaluation of outcome-focused (creative) projects.

These emphases are, moreover, reflected in the Government of Ireland's (2019) *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018-2023,* which encompasses both primary and post-primary schools.

2.3 Curriculum

Creative Clusters is located on a landscape of ongoing curriculum reform in Ireland. At post-primary level, the Framework for Junior Cycle was introduced in 2015. At the time of writing, a prolonged process of consultation with stakeholders at primary level on the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework (2020) had just been completed. In accordance with OECD and EU policy, creativity features prominently in the aforementioned frameworks.

2.3.1 Framework for Junior Cycle

One of the eight key principles underpinning the *Framework for Junior Cycle* is creativity and innovation. Creativity or innovation also features in eight of the Framework's 24 learning statements (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Learning Statements featuring creativity or innovation in Junior Cycle

The student:
- creates, appreciates and critically interprets a wide range of texts
- creates and presents artistic works and appreciates the process and skills involved
- devises and evaluates strategies for investigating and solving problems using mathematical knowledge, reasoning and skills
- uses appropriate technologies in meeting a design challenge
- applies practical skills as s/he develops models and products using a variety of materials and technologies
- takes initiative, is innovative and develops entrepreneurial skills
- brings an idea from conception to realisation
- uses technology and digital media tools to learn, communicate, work and think collaboratively and creatively in a responsible and ethical manner

Additionally, 'being creative' is identified as one of eight key cross-curricular skills, comprising the following elements:
- Imagining

- Exploring options and alternatives

- Implementing ideas and taking action

- Learning creatively

- Stimulating creativity using digital technology

2.3.2 Draft Primary Curriculum Framework

In the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* 'being creative' features as a key competency comprising the following attributes:

- Participating in and enjoying creative and cultural experiences

- Being curious

- Being imaginative

- Being innovative

- Using creative processes

- Exploring alternative ways of communicating (p.10)

Creativity is also recognised as an attribute of 'being a digital learner' and as a key component of arts and language education. In addition, partnerships, and engagement (features of Creative Clusters) are presented as key curriculum principles.

2.3.3 Curriculum and Creative Clusters

Both frameworks subscribe, like Creative Clusters, to a domain generic understanding of creativity. The elements (Junior Cycle) and attributes (Primary) ascribed to 'being creative' are consistent with the Five Creative Dispositions Model (see Figure 3). Both frameworks appear to privilege creative processes over creative products with the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* not referring to creative products at all. However, there is a distinct focus on creative products or creative outputs in the Five Creative Dispositions Model underpinning Creative Clusters.

2.4. Teacher professional learning

In terms of teacher CPD or teacher professional learning, creative clusters are constituted as Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). PLCs feature prominently in international literature on teachers' professional learning (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018; Harris & Jones, 2010; Williams, 2013). According to Wenger, McDermott & Snyder (2002), a PLC is formed when a group of professionals who share a common concern or passion interacts regularly

with a view to sharing and extending professional expertise and knowledge. A PLC can be formed by its members or by an external agent such as Creative Clusters. Ireland's Teaching Council (2016) promotes the participation by teachers in PLCs to enable 'them to extend their expertise' (p.5). Although definitions of PLCs vary, there is general agreement that effective PLCs enable:

- Teacher reflective dialogue
- Teacher-teacher collaboration
- The articulation of shared norms and goals
- A focus on pupil learning

These components of effective PLCs underline the development of Creative Clusters. The initiative also engages the elements of professional learning identified by the Teaching Council (*ibid*) as most likely to improve teachers' professional practice and children's learning:

- It is continuous and sustained
- It is closely connected to the work of teachers in the classroom
- It fosters teacher professional collaboration
- It relates coherently to broader school reform efforts.

PLCs enable teachers to co-construct knowledge and to take risks, with the latter identified as crucial for cultivating sustainable changes in teaching (see Hollands-Ish 2016; Hargreaves 2015; Dawson, Cawthon & Baker 2011). Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018) maintain that sustainable change is also dependent on the grounding of teacher-teacher dialogue in theory as well as practice. Additionally, Wenger et al. (2002) contend that if PLCs are to function effectively, some form of on the ground leadership is required. In Creative Clusters, this leadership is provided by the Creative Cluster Facilitator (see 1.5) and the Creative Cluster Coordinator (see 1.6). Prior to the development of Creative Clusters, ESCI had been enabling PLCs for various purposes for both primary and post-primary teachers. The approach to CPD promoted by Creative Clusters is, thereby, consistent with that of ESCI and the Teaching Council. This alignment ensures that Creative Clusters is well positioned to operationalise the strategy or objective relating to teacher CPD outlined in the Creative Youth Plan.

2.5. Collaborations between schools and the arts and cultural sector

As well as fostering collaborations between teachers and between schools, Creative Clusters aims to promote collaborations between schools and the arts and cultural sectors (see 1.1). While the arts and cultural sectors are generally supportive of such collaborations, Bowen and Kisida (2019) have found that:

> the '"backbone" organization, i.e. the entity that oversees the initiative's operations, can have a great deal of influence over participants' support for continuing these collective efforts. Specifically, arts' organizations willingness to support these efforts depends on their perceptions of whether their overseers successfully maintain transparency, effective communication, and resolving competing priorities (p.381).

As the 'backbone' of Creative Clusters, ESCI is ideally placed to support and sustain ongoing collaboration with the arts and cultural sectors at local level.

2.6 Programme logic model

The assumptions underpinning Creative Clusters, the national and international policy contexts in which it is embedded, and the material inputs, activities, outcomes, and impacts described so far are synthesised in the Programme Logic Model presented in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Programme Logic Model

Assumptions	Material inputs	Policy context	Activities	Expected outcomes	Impacts
Creativity is domain generic Creativity can be taught Creativity and innovation are key competencies for employability and wellbeing Creativity and innovation are key to economic and social development	School Excellence Fund: Creative Clusters (CC) Facilitator training Remuneration of CC Facilitators Regional Cluster Training for teachers School time and resources (including substitute cover for teachers to engage in CC) Subsistence for training and meetings Administration	OECD reports on creativity, innovation and the arts EU policy context Creative Ireland – Creative Youth Plan Arts in Education Charter Curriculum reform at primary and post-primary levels Cosán: Framework for teachers' learning Government of Ireland policy on wellbeing in schools	Recruitment of clusters of schools Recruitment of Cluster Facilitators Completion of Creative Clusters planning model documents Engagement of children and young people in creative projects	**A. Children and young people** New and experimental ways of working Improved creativity Improved wellbeing Greater collaboration within and beyond the classroom Improved learning outcomes Access to expertise beyond as well as within the school **B. Teachers and schools** Long term partnerships between teachers, schools and external agencies Improved creativity Improved teaching and new pedagogies Increased dialogue and reflection **C. Policy makers** Increased understanding of the impact of clustering schools at different competency levels in terms of the arts and creativity Understanding of impact of CCs	Improved creativity for pupils and teachers Schools embed creativity into their ethos Better connections between schools and local, regional and national agencies Cultivation of long term partnerships involving external agencies Improved status within education of the arts and creativity

3. Research and evaluation

3.1 Aims

Through an examination of the pilot phase of the Creative Clusters initiative, the research and evaluation process sought to:

- Provide evidence-based recommendations for the future development of the initiative
- Evaluate the impact on teaching and learning of participation in Creative Clusters
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the cluster model
- Uncover the approaches used within and between clusters to integrate with the objectives of the Creative Youth Plan (see 2.1) as follows:
  - To support collaboration between formal and non-formal approaches to creativity in education
  - To extend the range of creative activities for our young people
  - To embed the creative process
  - To enable Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for teachers and artists.

3.2 Research methodology and approaches

A mixed methods approach was designed to meet the research and evaluation objectives. The overall data collection timeline – interrupted by an extended period of school closure from March 2020 until August/September 2020 – began in January 2020 and continued until December 2021. A further period of data collection took place between March 2021 and May 2021 (following another school closure).

The research and evaluation process began with a document analysis, which yielded both quantitative and qualitative data. Qualitative and quantitative approaches were also used to capture the perspectives of all participants: Education Support Centre Directors; Creative Cluster Facilitators; participating teachers, children, and young people. Online questionnaires were sent to all participating teachers, Creative Cluster Facilitators and Education Centre Directors. Telephone interviews were subsequently conducted with a purposive sample of respondents from the latter two cohorts.

At the outset, it was planned to conduct case studies of four clusters (two Implementers and two Adapters). Accordingly, the researcher planned to visit schools in selected clusters on at least two occasions. On these visits, she planned to involve children and young people in age-appropriate research tasks and to engage in informal interviews with participating teachers (including principals). However, school closures due to COVID-19, and the ensuing restrictions in schools (and on the researcher), meant that these visits could not take place. As a result, it was decided to invite a purposive sample of participating teachers to administer and report on research tasks with children and young people. This ensured, in as far as possible, the inclusion of the perspectives of children and young people in the research and evaluation process.

The teachers were accessed, in the first instance, via the Education Support Centre Directors who, in their returned questionnaires, had consented to engage in telephone interviews and, after that, via the Creative Cluster Facilitators reporting to those Directors. To ensure a broader geographical spread and to ensure as many school types as possible were represented, two further Education Centre Directors were approached directly by the researcher.

Since the research and evaluation was conducted by a lecturer in a Higher Education Institute (HEI), ethical approval was sought from that Institute prior to commencement. Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee (MIREC) approved the planned research and evaluation in October 2019 and was notified of all subsequent changes, and the reasons for them, in early November 2020.

3.2.1 Research methods

Between January 2020 and December 2021, the following research methods were employed:

An overview of Creative Clusters was generated from a **document analysis** of the initiative's promotional materials and guidelines for applicants. An overview of the nature of the projects planned in each academic year was generated from a document analysis of completed Planning Model Documents and additional records provided by the National Arts in Education Administrative Office (This overview was revised in April 2021, following the provision of further Planning Model Documents by the National Arts in Education Administrative Office.) The analysis was both quantitative and qualitative in nature (see 4). An analysis of end of year

(2018/19) Cluster evaluations by participating teachers provided additional feedback on Implementers. Valuable insights were thus achieved into teaching and learning, the approaches used to integrate with the objectives of the Creative Youth Plan, the effectiveness of the cluster model and the benefits and challenges being experienced on the ground. Analysis of a survey issued, by the National Arts in Education Administration Office at the Education Centre, Tralee, to Education Support Centre Directors early in the first term of the 2019/20 school year also yielded valuable insights into the administrative workings of the cluster model. A document analysis of contemporary national and international policy on creativity and schools (with reference to recent research on creativity in education) enabled the location of Creative Clusters in a policy and research context (see 2). This analysis also informed the analysis of the research findings and fed into the conclusions and recommendations contained in this report.

An online **questionnaire** – designed to accommodate the views of principals, Creative Cluster Coordinators, nominated school representatives, and other participating teachers – was sent to teachers in April 2020. This questionnaire, which enabled the gathering of both qualitative and quantitative data, allowed for reflective comments on:

- the impact on teaching and learning of participation in Creative Clusters
- the effectiveness of the cluster model
- the embedding of the creative process in schools

Online questionnaires were also sent to Creative Cluster Facilitators and Education Support Centre Directors in October 2021.

Semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted, in November and December 2020 and in May 2021, with purposive samples from the following cohorts:

- Education Support Centre Directors (four)
- Creative Cluster Facilitators (four)

The perspectives of children and young people were – due to the school closures and restricted access to schools resulting from COVID-19 – the most difficult to capture. Since the researcher could not visit schools, a purposive sample of teachers was enlisted to seek requisite permissions (from pupils, their guardians, and Boards of Management) for existing records of their projects to be used as data. The teachers also administered, and reported on,

age-appropriate **learner research-tasks** designed to capture pupil's perspectives. (The researcher was satisfied that the necessary permissions were obtained for the latter but not for the former, which are, consequently, not included as a data set.) The research tasks were selected by teachers from a menu provided by the researcher (see Appendix D). The tasks selected, and administered across seven schools, comprised focus group interviews and the compilation of books of meaning.

A **cost-benefit analysis** was conducted in October and November 2021.

3.3 Data analysis

Analysis across all data sets sought to illuminate the benefits and challenges afforded by Creative Clusters with reference to the aims of the research and evaluation process (see 3.1 and 2.1). The analytic process was inductive to the extent that it explicitly sought to address these aims, which are categorised under the following thematic headings:

- Cluster model
- Teaching, learning and the inclusion of pupil voice
- Collaboration between formal and informal education sectors
- Range of creative activities
- Embedding the creative process
- Approaches to CPD

The process was also deductive in that it allowed for the emergence of further themes.

3.4 Ethical considerations

Throughout the project, normal ethical procedures were adhered to. The purpose of the on-line questionnaires was clearly explained in an accompanying e-mail and respondent confidentiality and anonymity were assured. All those who participated in telephone interviews and teachers involved in compiling records and administering learner research-tasks received verbal and written explanations of the nature and purpose of their involvement and the purposes for which data supplied by them would be used. They were, moreover, provided with information sheets and they signed consent forms. Children and young people were also provided with (age appropriate) information sheets and they too signed (age appropriate) consent forms. Additionally, anyone who participated in a telephone interview was afforded the opportunity to check the transcript of her/his interview. Electronic files were

also encrypted. In order to safeguard participants' confidentiality and anonymity, data provided by individual participants is presented in this report in numerical format e.g. **T**eacher 1 (T1), **C**reative **C**luster **F**acilitator 1 (CCF1) etc.).

4. An overview of the projects planned in each Cluster

4.1 Implementers

The Implementer Clusters were convened in the 2018/19 school year.

4.1.1 Implementers 2018/19

Of the 23 Implementers, all returned Planning Model Documents in 2018/19. These documents provide broad outline project plans (see Appendix C for template). An overview of the projects planned is provided in Figures 6 and 7. Eleven clusters planned to explore various aspects of wellbeing and the environment using visual and literary media (See Figure 6, 1-11). Five planned to engage in STEM/STEAM related projects (12-16). Four planned to explore (predominantly local) history or myth using a variety of media (17-20). Two planned to concentrate on one or more art forms (21-22) and one planned to focus on cookery (23). Only one of the clusters (9, Love your beach) appeared to plan for community engagement beyond that of either data collection or the showcasing of young people's work. An overview of the projects planned by Implementers in 2018/19 is provided in Figures 6 and 7 and an overview of Implementer plans for 2019/20 is provided in Figure 15.

Figure 6: Implementer project plans 2018/19

1. Title: *Creating headspace*   **Plan:** To create outdoor art and craft displays inspired by being mindful in nature and to generate a video diary of the process
2. Title: *Life – the drama of it all*   **Plan:** To explore diversity and resilience and to develop coping skills ("Daydreaming Brian")
3. Title: *Journal journey*   **Plan**: To create personal journals using a variety of visual media
4. Title: *Creative inspiration*   **Plan**: To create spaces where wellbeing is fostered using construction, painting, pottery, fabric and fibre and the creation of a mural
5. Title: None   **Plan**: To explore the effects of reduced phone usage in a school entertainment event
6. Title: *Inclusion through activity*   **Plan**: Fun and run and GAA as the basis for cross-curricular work using drawing and animation
7. Title: *Bee creative*   **Plan:** Arts projects linked to bees, leading to a showcase
8. Title: *Mighty oaks from little acorns grow*   **Plan**: Using the local environment as a stimulus for creating and responding in a variety of visual media; showcase exhibition

9. Title: *Love your beach* **Plan:** To conduct a beach clean-up and to explore the environment using sand casting; to lobby local representatives and businesses
10. Title: *Garraí Suain* **Plan:** To create a sensory garden in which pupils can reflect, be well, be creative and learn
11. Title: *Improving biodiversity in our community* **Plan:** To develop school gardens
12. Title: STEAM: *Making connections* **Plan**: To explore roads/motorways/bridges/airports/ships/electricity and to use engineering skills to build bridges
13. Title: *Exploration of toys* **Plan:** To make and explore toys, attending to workability (science) and design (visual arts)
14. Title: none **Plan:** To develop an Aistear style approach to STEAM subjects
15. Title: *Kid Koders* **Plan**: To use coding to develop innovative and creative inter-school projects, supporting transitions
16. Title: D10 *Creative Scientists* **Plan:** For students to design and carry out experiments that generate a sense of excitement about science; showcase of young people's work.
17. Title: None **Plan**: To explore Sligo's mythological heritage in collaboration with local artists
18. Title: *The hidden history of North Kerry: A flying visit* **Plan:** To investigate and document information on tourist sites in North Kerry (orally and visually) and to make an audio-visual documentary.
19. Title: None **Plan:** To use local folklore as the basis for making animated films in each participating school
20. Title: *Our children bringing Irish mythology into 2019 and beyond* **Plan:** To explore the topic through the arts (namely visual arts and drama), IT, SESE and literature.
21. Title: TBC as part of the process **Plan:** To develop a collaborative theatrical street performance in a public area and to engage visual art in response to the experience
22. Title: *Art is a messaging tool* **Plan**: To create a cluster exhibition using photography, painting, sculpture, installation, textiles, creative writing, and performance
23. Title: None **Plan**: Cooking and baking

Figure 7: Overview of Implementer project plans 2018/19
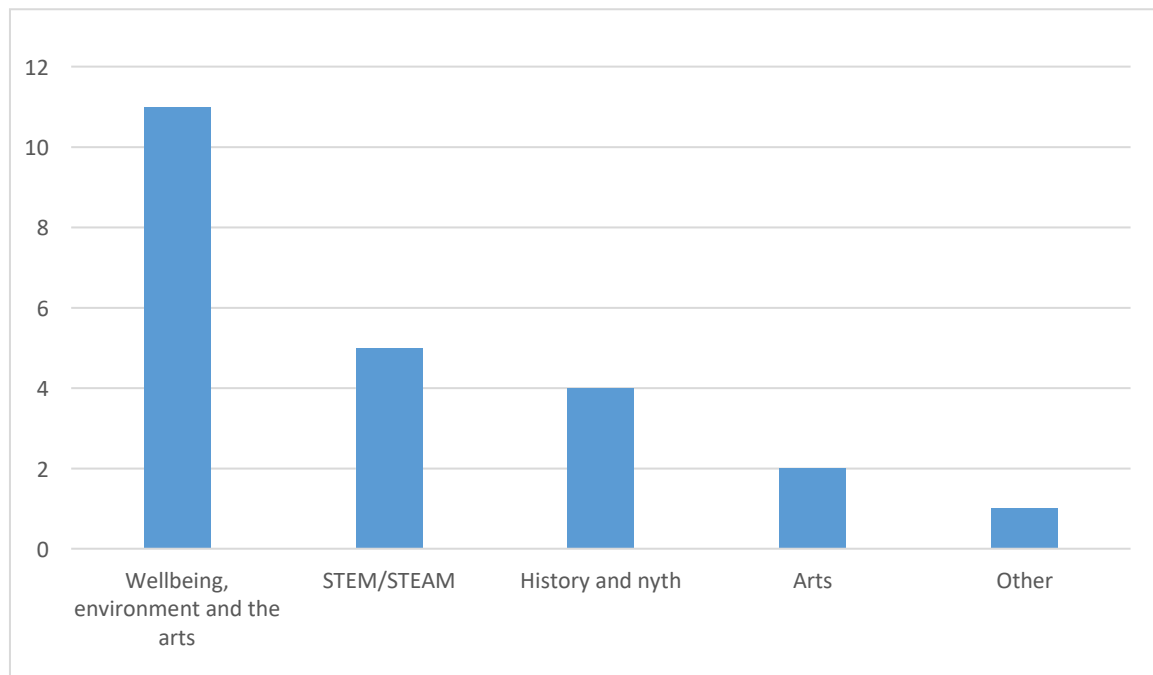
4.1.2 Implementers 2019/20

Of the 23 Implementers, 21 returned Planning Model Documents in 2019/20. An analysis of the documents revealed that 16 of those clusters planned to develop the themes and ideas outlined in their previous year's plans. In three of those plans, the exploration of wellbeing was broadened from personal wellbeing to wellbeing in communities (See Figure 8). In another, the previous year's plan was transferred to another location, with an additional focus on the project as a 'campaign project' (See Figure 9). Other plans too indicated developmental shifts in focus: from stillness to motion (See Figure 10), from biodiversity in the community to building relationships in the community (see Figure 11), and from a national to an international perspective (see Figure 12). The remaining eight of these 16 plans, focused specifically on developing and expanding the 2018/19 plans (See Figure 13). Although five of the clusters developed what appear to be completely new plans (See Figure 14), most of these plans too were more specific than those of the previous year. In 2019/20, five of the Implementers planned for community engagement (other than data collection or showcasing) beyond their schools:

- Creating headspace (Figure 8)
- Love your town (Figure 9)
- Building relationships in our community (Figure 11)

- North Kerry digital storytelling (Figure 13)

- Shedding light (Figure 14)

Figure 8: From personal wellbeing to wellbeing in communities

Plan 18/19	Plan for development 19/20
Title: *Creating headspace* **Plan:** To create outdoor art and craft displays inspired by being mindful in nature and to generate a video diary of the process	**Title:** *Creating headspace* **Plan:** To take the work into the community by creating public art works around the themes of mindfulness and wellbeing
Title: *Life – the drama of it all* **Plan:** To explore diversity and resilience and to develop coping skills ("Daydreaming Brian")	**Title:** *The connected schools* **Plan:** To expand the focus on personal wellbeing into fostering wellbeing in school communities using various art forms
Title: *Journal journey* **Plan**: To create personal journals using a variety of visual media	**Title:** *Art postcard swap* **Plan:** To design and create postcards exploring identity and to connect with others by creating a mobile gallery 'art in transit'

Figure 9: From beach to town

Plan 18/19	Plan for development 19/20
Title: *Love your beach* **Plan:** To conduct a beach clean-up and to explore the environment using sand casting (a community based 'campaign project' drawing attention to the local environment)	**Title:** *Love your town* **Plan:** To conduct a town clean up and to create art works to be displayed and archived locally (a community-based 'campaign project', drawing attention to the local urban environment)

Figure 10: From stillness to motion

Plan 18/19	Plan for development 19/20
Title: STEAM: *Making connections* **Plan**: To explore roads/airports/ships/electricity and to use engineering skills to build bridges	**Title:** *Motion in action* **Plan:** To explore movement in the body, plants, animals, and water and to use engineering skills go build moving objects

Figure 11: From biodiversity to human relationships

Plan 18/19	Plan for development 19/20
Title: *Improving biodiversity in our community* **Plan:** To develop school gardens	**Title:** *Building relationships in our community* **Plan:** To make a copper tree sculpture

Figure 12: From national to international

Plan 18/19	Plan for development 19/20
Title: *Our children bringing Irish mythology into 2019 and beyond* **Plan:** To explore the topic through the arts (namely visual arts and drama), IT, SESE and literature	**Title:** *Looking into our classrooms … exploring countries from around the world* **Plan:** Each class explores a country in various ways, e.g. written project, the arts, culture, folklore, language

Figure 13: From general to specific

Plan 18/19	Plan for development 19/20
Title: D10 *Creative Scientists* **Plan:** For students to design and carry out experiments that generate a sense of excitement about science. To showcase work	**Title:** D10 *Creative Scientists* **Plan:** To continue engaging in atypical collaboration (involving primary and post-primary students) To showcase work for other students, schools, and community
Title: None **Plan**: To explore the effects of reduced phone usage in a school entertainment event	**Title:** None **Plan**: As per previous year with a focus on creating awareness of opportunities for participation in third level education
Title: *Creative inspiration* **Plan**: To create spaces where wellbeing is fostered using visual media	**Title:** Sensory space **Plan**: To develop an enclosed outdoor sensory space with seating area, food forest, permaculture, water feature etc**.**
Title: none **Plan**: To develop an Aistear style approach to STEAM subjects	**Title:** *Fiosracht* **Plan:** To build on year one, focusing on using themes (e.g. trees) for STEAM education with middle and senior classes
Title: None **Plan**: Cooking and baking	**Title**: *Diverse dimensions of design* **Plan:** To design a garden and outdoor classroom and to design menus and recipes for produce grown (incorporating film/app design)
Title: *Garraí Suain* (Dream Garden) **Plan:** To construct a sensory garden	**Title:** *Garraí Suain* (Dream Garden) **Plan:** Building on knowledge and skills of previous year to foster wellbeing, collaborative reflection and the garden as a reflective space using meditation, gardening, cooking, poetry and drawing
Title: *Kid Koders* **Plan:** To create innovative coding projects supporting transitions	**Title:** *Kid Koders* **Plan:** To establish coding clubs for specific coding projects with TY pupils working with senior primary pupils and senior primary pupils working with juniors
Title: *The hidden history of North Kerry: A flying visit*	**Title:** North Kerry digital storytelling

Plan: To investigate and document information on tourist sites in North Kerry and to make an audio-visual documentary	**Plan:** To create and distribute podcasts on local history/myths
Title: None **Plan:** To use local folklore as the basis for making animated films in each participating school	**Title:** *Stormin' Normans* **Plan:** To use pupils' responses to a local museum as a starting point for further exploration

Figure 14: Planning for new projects

Plan 18/19	Plan 19/20
Title: TBC as part of the process **Plan:** To develop a collaborative theatrical street performance in a public area and to engage visual art in response to the experience	**Title:** TBC **Plan:** To use creative journaling to learn about the self and the surrounding world
Title: *Exploration of toys* **Plan:** To make and explore toys, attending to workability (science) and design (visual arts)	**Title:** *A caring eco-friendly school creation* **Plan:** To draw on children's creative skills to analyse their school environment, identify how they can enhance it to create and develop a plan using visual arts and STEAM principles
Title: *Art is a messaging tool* **Plan**: To create a cluster exhibition using photography, painting, sculpture, installation, textiles, creative writing and performance	**Title***: Shedding light* **Plan:** Students collect data from the elderly as the basis for the design and delivery of a series of stained-glass workshops in a local nursing home
Title: *Bee creative* **Plan:** Arts projects linked to bees, leading to a showcase	**Title:** *Le Chéile* **Plan:** To develop a sense of belonging, connectivity and community through visual art, animation, and dance
Title: None **Plan**: To explore Sligo's mythological heritage in collaboration with local artists	**Title:** *Postcards from the heart* **Plan:** To make connections between TY students and primary school students by making and sending postcards (as well as letters from TY students)

Figure 15: Overview of Implementer project plans 2019/20
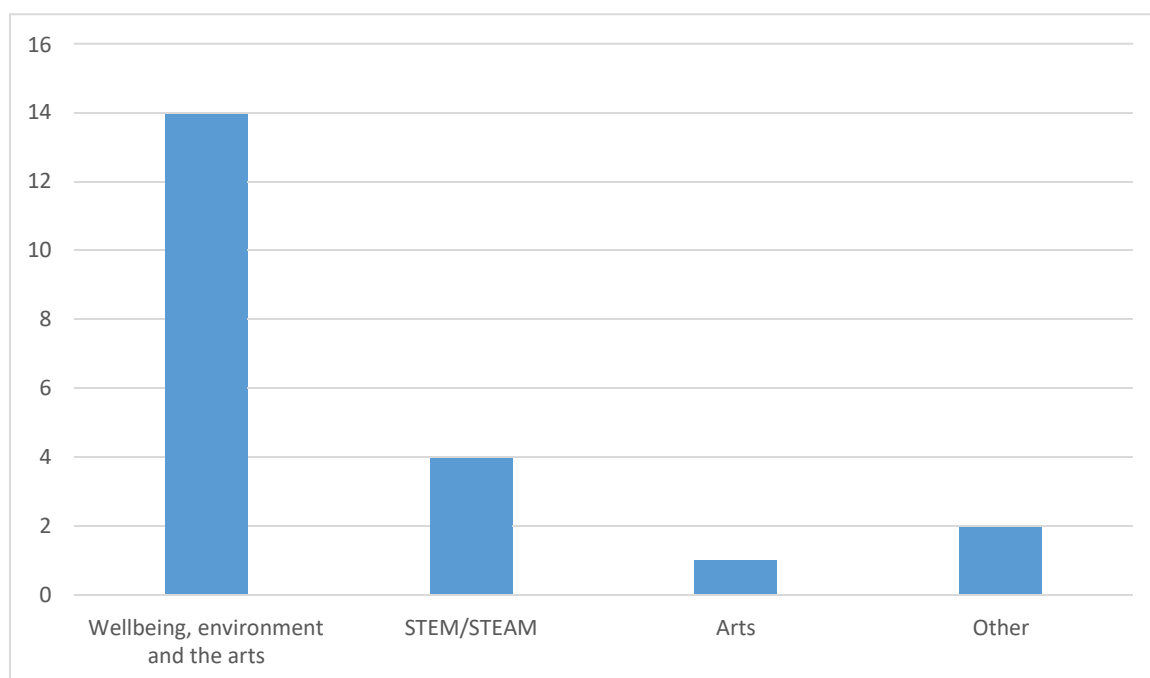
4.2 Adapters

Of the 21 Adapters (Clusters convened in 2019/20), 20 returned Planning Model Documents. A summary of the projects planned is provided in Figures 16 and 17. Five clusters planned to explore various aspects of wellbeing and the environment using the arts (See Figure 16, 1-5). Five of the plans were STEM/STEAM related (6-10) and three were related to local history (11-13). One focused on planning for a school E-zine and photography exhibition (14), another focused on Irish music, dance, and heritage (15) and the remaining five focused on one or more of the arts (16-20). None of the Adapters appeared to plan for community engagement beyond data collection and the showcasing of young people's work.

Figure 16: Adapter project plans 2019/20

1. Title: *Creative explorers* **Plan:** To promote team building through engagement in ceramics, glass, puppetry, dance, and orienteering
2. Title: *Creativity and inclusion in the playground* **Plan:** To develop each school's playground as a more inclusive, creative, and safe space for children drawing on ideas from Forest Schools, designating areas for creative play and quietness, creating an outdoor classroom, using willow structures
3. Title: *Film* **Plan:** To develop a Community of Practice (CoP) to improve literacy and promote wellbeing using film (in partnership with IFI)
4. Title: *Inclusion through creative arts*

Plan: To use a variety of art forms to enable children from participating schools to learn from each other	
5. Title: (updated) *Website: wellbeing and living with COVID-19.* **Plan**: As per title	
6. Title: *Creative robotics* **Plan:** To integrate robotics and programming with the arts	
7. Title: *Using Lego to promote creative thinking in the classroom* **Plan:** To use Lego to stimulate creative and independent learning – 3D visualisation, design, stop motion, animation, robotics, coding, creative writing, dexterity, and fine motor skills	
8. Title: *Coding and robotics* **Plan:** To develop basic coding skills using micro-bits and to progress to robot programming. Plan to involve TY students in mentoring of primary students	
9. Title: *Animation, digital storytelling, and coding: A collaboration* **Plan:** As per title	
10. Title: *Steam ahead* **Plan:** 4 questions posed by children about humans and the environment explored through science and visual art	
11 Title: *Killarnopoly* **Plan:** To show and tell the story of Killarney's culture, folklore, places, and people using technology and the creative arts	
12. Title: *Hidden histories* **Plan:** To develop an archive of stories from oral history interviews and historical artefacts and to present these stories using storytelling, drama, photography, puppetry, and music online and face to face.	
13. Title: *Architectural history of Youghal* **Plan:** To develop a comprehensive architectural history of Youghal using various media, local exploration, guest speakers and pupil's questions	
14. Title: *School magazine/Schoolzine and Photography Exhibition* **Plan:** To use photography (curation), creative writing (poetry and short stories), illustration, fashion, cookery, design, layout, interview techniques to create Ezine and exhibition	
15. Title: *Fleadh Ceol* **Plan:** To explore Irish music, dance, and heritage	
16. Title: *A journey together through the arts* **Plan:** To receive and respond to arts events (in various art forms) and to engage in collaborative workshops towards the generation of a public performance/display	
17. Title: *Crafting connections* **Plan:** To use construction, fabric and fibre, recycled materials, and expressive arts to explore the purposes of materials through time	
18. Title: *DREAMM (Drop Everything and Make Music* **Plan:** To promote informal music making and to develop indoor and outdoor sensory areas with found objects and homemade musical instruments	
19. Title: *You cannot be what you cannot see* **Plan:** To encourage children to be creative beyond their comfort zones by engaging with artists (art form/s not specified)	
20. Title: *Empowering the creative voice*	

Plan: To use process drama and visual art to give all pupils a voice and to empower teachers to facilitate the pupils' ideas

Figure 17: Overview of Adapter project plans 2019/20
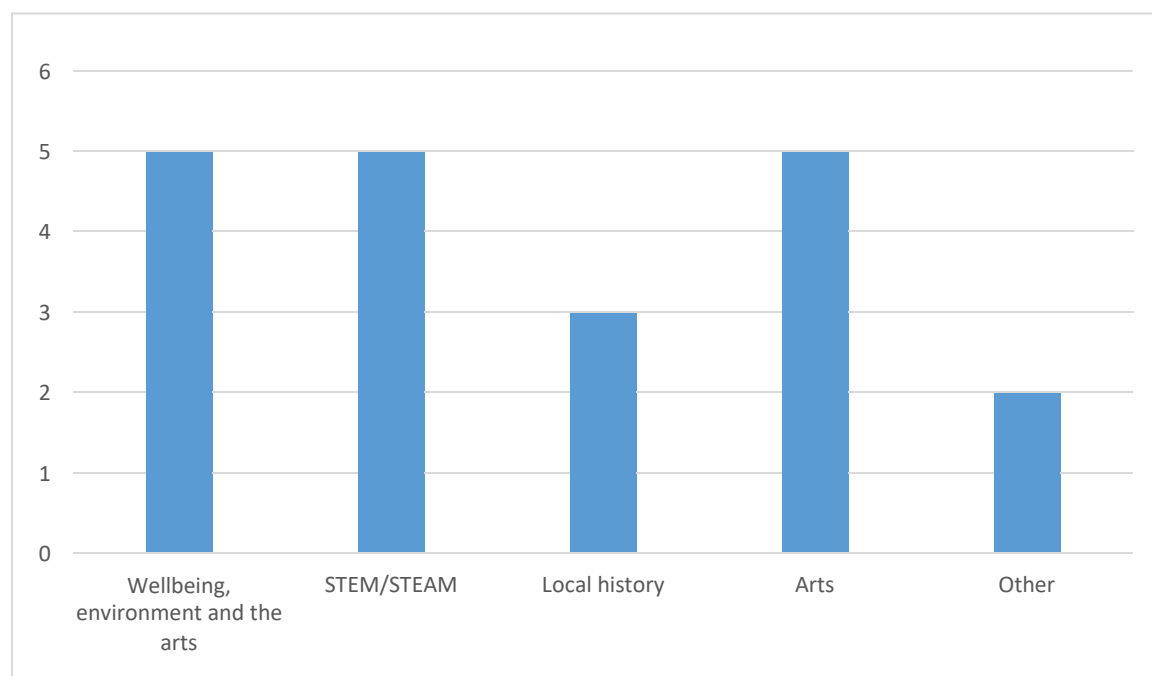
4.3 Summary of findings drawn from Implementer and Adapter project plans

64 out of a possible total of 67 Planning Model Documents were returned over the two academic years 2018/19 and 2019/20. This marks a return rate of just over 95%. These returns (given that plans returned by 16 of the Implementers expanded and developed the original projects into two-year projects) describe a total of 49 projects over the two-year period. 19 of the plans related to wellbeing, the environment, and the arts, eleven were STEM/STEAM related, nine related to local history, six focused on one or more of the arts and four did not fit into any broad category. This breakdown is illustrated in Figure 18. Additionally, five Implementers developed plans for community engagement (other than data collection or showcasing) beyond their schools (see 4.1.2). Four of these plans emerged in the second year of the project.

Figure 18: Overview of projects planned for 2018/19 and 2019/20
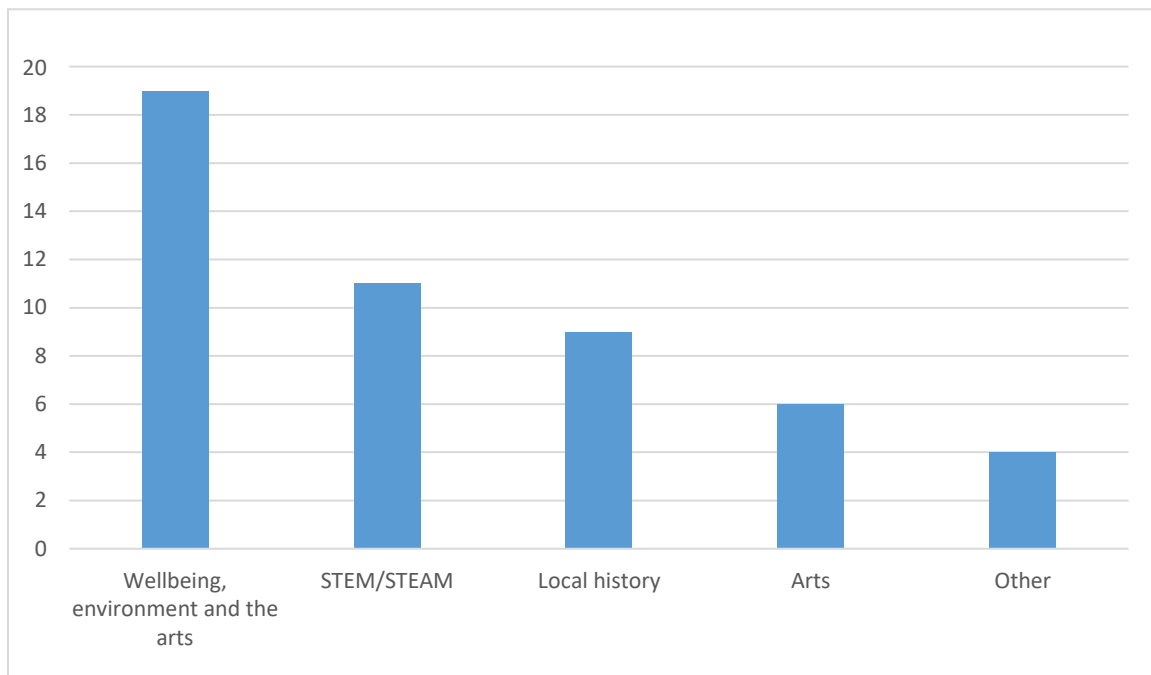
In alignment with the commitment to the centrality of the voice of children and young people in the Creative Youth Plan and in Creative Clusters itself, the Planning Module Documents reveal plans for including children and young people's voices in a wide variety of ways: brainstorming, planning, designing, voting, collaborative pair work, small group collaborations, experimenting, mentoring, evaluating, distributing etc. In keeping with the aims of the Creative Ireland Programme and the Creative Youth Plan, the Planning Model Documents reveal plans for a broad 'range of creative activities' (Plan, p.9; see Figures 6-18) and planning for the arts 'not just as curriculum subjects but as instruments for education more generally' (Plan, p.11, see Figures 6-18).

5. Key findings: Education Support Centre Directors

In this section (5), and in the following three sections (6, 7, and 8) the key findings from research participants are presented as follows:

- The perspectives of Education Support Centre Directors (5)

- The perspectives of Creative Cluster Facilitators (6)

- The perspectives of teachers (7)

- The perspectives of children and young people (8)

This order is not intended to reflect any perceived hierarchy among the participants but to illuminate the exposition in this report of Creative Clusters as a national programme of local projects. Accordingly, it was decided to focus, in the first instance, on the more macro-level perspectives of Education Support Centre Directors, then on the operational perspectives of the Creative Cluster Facilitators and finally, on the micro-level perspectives pertaining to the day-to-day operationalisation of the initiative on the ground from teachers, children and young people.

5.1 Education Support Centre Directors' perspectives

The key findings in this section are drawn from the responses of Education Support Centre Directors to the following:

- Education Support Centre Director Survey issued by the Arts in Education Administrative Office at the Education Centre, Tralee early in 2019/20 (coded as SD1 etc. where the number is the number assigned to a Director)[5]

- Education Support Centre Director Online Questionnaire issued by researcher (coded as QD1, QD2 etc.)

- Telephone Interviews with four Education Support Centre Directors (coded as TID1, TID2 etc.)

Out of a total of 21 full-time Education Support Centre Directors, nine responded to the survey issued by the Education Centre, Tralee, representing a response rate of just under 43%. Although the questions posed in this survey were open-ended, the Directors' responses focused primarily on the administrative aspects of Creative Clusters. Nine Directors

---

[5] There is no known correspondence between the numbers assigned to participants across data sets. For example, D1 in the Telephone Interviews and D1 in the Survey do not necessarily indicate the same participant.

responded to the on-line questionnaire issued by the researcher, representing a response rate of just under 33%. Of those seven Directors, five of them stated that their Education Support Centres had been involved with both Implementer and Adapter Clusters while two Centres had been involved with Adapter Clusters only. Given the relatively small number of respondents overall, the findings from these data sets are combined with the findings from the four Director Telephone Interviews in a single data set. (Two of the interviewees were newly appointed Directors and two were in the role for over two years.) In this way, the Directors' perspectives are represented as coherently and holistically as possible.

The key findings from the Directors are presented under the following headings:

- Cluster model (5.2)
- Teaching and learning (5.3)
- Collaboration between formal and informal education sectors (5.4)
- Range of creative activities (5.5)
- Embedding the creative process (5.6)
- Approaches to CPD (5.7)

5.2 Education Support Centres (Directors) and the Cluster model

Overall, Directors commented very favourably on the model across the data sets, as illustrated in the following text box:

'The programme worked extraordinarily well.' (TID1)

'Cluster model is excellent especially for the sharing of the project between staff from the participant schools and the pupils from the participant schools.' (QD1)

'What has really worked is the collaboration of like-minded people working together as a cluster for the betterment of the children in their classrooms.' (QD7)

'A wonderful addition for schools.' (TID2)

'Creative Clusters is innovative, fantastic, brings schools together.' (TID4)

'The opportunity for teachers to work with colleagues in other schools has been very successful, creating relationships across these schools.' (QD3)

> 'Establishment of professional learning communities and clustering of schools and colleagues … hopefully ongoing.' (QD2)

They also commented on the positive feedback they received from schools:

> 'Schools have really enjoyed this very worthwhile programme.' (SD8)
>
> 'Feedback from schools was very positive. Funding for schools really appreciated.' (SD9)
>
> 'The Creative Clusters meetings worked really well to generate new ideas excitement and enthusiasm. Working collaboratively on a plan across schools is different to working within a school staff. The meetings gave … time, a whole day at a time, to work together. This is unusual for teachers. Teachers felt there was no pressure of time.' (TID2)

Not surprisingly, however, the primary focus of the Directors was on their role and that of their Centres' administrative staff, which they identified as key to the success of the Cluster model. All respondents to the researcher questionnaire, saw the Centres as very well positioned to meet the demands of the Creative Clusters initiative, notwithstanding the administrative challenges they experienced.

> 'Budget and administration draining, complicated and confusing, though support from Tralee was excellent.' (TID2)
>
> 'Admin is huge. There's a massive amount of paperwork. Administrative staff are already up to their tonsils. Creative Clusters is one of many new programmes and there's no additional staff.' (TID4)

5.2.1 A national programme of local clusters

At local level, the Directors played a significant role in getting the initiative off the ground. The response to the initial call for applications from schools in 2018/19 was poor, and many Centres received no applications. Consequently, many Directors harnessed their local knowledge to get the initiative up and running, and approached schools directly:

> 'I approached schools where I thought someone might be interested, explained the commitment and asked them to identify other schools they might work with … an enabling role … encouraging active schools to apply … With local knowledge you can encourage and

> inspire schools who may be thinking about it to submit … and assist with the application.' (TID1)

One Director observed that while: 'the concept was there … there were no clear guidelines and administration was challenging' (TID4). Despite these challenges, 17 of the 21 full-time Centres were allocated Implementer Clusters, with one Centre being allocated two Implementers, and three being allocated three (See Fig. 1). The role played by the Directors in enabling this to happen was crucial. They 'connected local schools … [they] enabled, facilitated, encouraged and inspired at local level' (TID1). And, as the projects progressed, they facilitated the smooth running and ongoing development of the model by linking in regularly with all parties involved. One Director noted that there was also an 'increased {technical] role for the Director' in organising Zoom meetings during the COVID-19 pandemic (QD6).

The nomination of suitably skilled Creative Cluster Facilitators (see 2.1) was particularly challenging and highly dependent on the Directors' local knowledge:

> 'The onus is on the Director to ensure that the Creative Cluster Facilitator wants the projects to succeed, has the persuasive skills to get schools to commit to the project … to ensure that they do the project and draw it to a conclusion.' (TID1)

It was clear, across all data sets, that the Directors saw the role of the Creative Cluster Facilitator as a critical one. They also noted that Facilitators could be, and were, expected by some teachers to do the work on the ground. One Director stated that:

> 'The role of the Creative Cluster Facilitator is beyond crucial, knitting the group together, keeping it together and on-task is a key skill. Knowledge in an area is less important. It needs to be someone with an educational background, who understands the mechanics of schools and children and learning and have worked with children before. It would be definitely beneficial if it was a teacher, but facilitation is a skill in itself so it's not necessarily down to being a teacher. The person leads the group, sets targets, manages personality clashes … Needs to report consistently to the Director who needs to know what's going on.' (TID4).

However, when Directors did not have established local working relationships, they struggled not just to convene clusters but to source suitably skilled Facilitators as well. These difficulties

were exacerbated, according to one Director, by the fact that teachers in full-time employment were not permitted to take up the role (TID2). (One such teacher, approached by another Director, was, nevertheless, authorised to do so and this is addressed in more detail in 6.) The challenges were particularly acute in 2018/19 when 'there were 14 new Directors [out of a total of 21 Directors] in the system' (TID4). And, in one instance:

> 'Schools felt that facilitator appointed by centre didn't have necessary skills and background in the area of the arts - this was centre's fault as no director in place at that time.' (SD4)

The issue of Director turnover was, however, identified as an ongoing rather than a once-off problem, as the following comments illustrate:

> '[A Director has] just one five-year tenure … should be a seven-year tenure, with the option to reapply … We need stability to work to a target … Creative Clusters has suffered greatly because of the constant turnover of Directors. Creative Clusters is only one project. New Directors have to get their heads around lots of projects and systems. Directors are just getting their heads around a project and they're gone, and the new Directors have to start all over again … It's so difficult for a project to improve when the Director has zero knowledge of the project and of the Education Centre.' (TID4)
>
> 'The high turnover of Directors means that Directors are not familiar with projects and facilitators. This is a huge weakness. The Director is not vested, doesn't know people, has no connection with co-ordinators. Doesn't know schools, doesn't know project, doesn't know Creative Cluster Facilitators.' (TID1)

These comments also highlight the importance of Director continuity in the ongoing management and development of Creative Clusters at local level. Additionally, Director continuity was seen as important within the Education Support Centre network itself. As one Director put it, 'without huge knowledge and experience it's impossible to knit a network together' (TID4) and, consequently, to develop the robust systems required for Directors to support each other to manage national initiatives at local level.

5.3 Teaching and learning

Directors commented very favourably on the opportunities for teaching and learning afforded by the initiative, identifying finance and inter-school collaboration as key enablers in this regard:

'The schools … have benefitted from the funding to purchase equipment to enable students to learn to code and support each other's learning in all three schools.' (SD3)

'Having the funds to invest in a project that they may not otherwise have been in a position to – financial. Schools learn from others, feed on each other's strengths … [Students have] the opportunity to lead and be involved in their own learning – much more student centred.' (QD6)

'The funding being allocated to schools for the arts is so beneficial and valued … schools are becoming more arts aware. Kids get to interpret what they consider to be art. The whole process is more open to students and their opinions are valued.' (QD4)

5.4 Collaboration between formal and informal education sectors

In accordance with the commitment to dialogue and partnership iterated in the Creative Youth Plan, and in Creative Clusters itself, the Directors identified various collaborations between the formal and informal education sectors enabled by Creative Clusters:

'The clusters' development of a database of local resource/activities for creative possibilities for children, which the schools can refer to for future arts activities is so important and will be most valuable to schools going forward.' (QD6)

'Building of relationships at school level and with the artistic community.' (QD1)

'Building up the teachers' confidence to work with arts agencies and in turn giving children the confidence with different art forms. The schools are more aware of local resources/facilities to enhance the choices for their students, to allow a fuller knowledge and interaction for all children.' (QD4)

'Built connections between schools, Education Centre and schools, arts organisations and communities.' (TID1)

5.5 Range of creative activities

The participation by clusters in a broad range of creative activities was corroborated by the Directors (see also section 4). Additionally, the Directors emphasised the opportunities afforded by the initiative for both teachers and pupils 'to think outside the box' (TID1). And, in alignment with the Creative Youth Plan, in which Creative Clusters is embedded, Creative Clusters enabled the range of activities in which students engaged to be extended, as exemplified in the following comment:

> 'The schools have progressed a very innovative project and have worked well together to do so. They have benefitted from the funding to purchase equipment to enable students to learn to code and support each other's learning in all three schools.' (SD3)

5.6 Embedding the creative process

The principal was seen as the key enabler in embedding the creative process in schools.

> 'The principal is key to whether the project remains in one class or involves the school as a whole.' (TID1)

Where the principal was less than enthusiastic, there were difficulties with project implementation. These difficulties were exacerbated when interested teachers left a school, and other teachers who were not necessarily interested in the project, took over (sometimes reluctantly) (TID2). This put a lot of pressure on Facilitators 'to keep the momentum going and hold schools accountable' (TID1). The challenges posed by COVID-19 were particularly acute in small schools where principals also tended to be Creative Cluster Coordinators or nominated school representatives. Some of these principals, though committed to Creative Clusters, considered opting out of the initiative due to the increase in their overall workload (TID3). The initiative itself contributed to this increase, with extra materials needing to be procured and materials needing to be managed more carefully. One Director suggested that another teacher, with a post of responsibility in the school, might be better placed to take on these roles into the future (TID3).

Another key factor in embedding the creative process in schools was the time set aside for developing professional relationships and, concomitantly, for developing, 'hopefully ongoing', Professional Learning Communities or PLCs (QD2).

'The opportunities for teachers to work with colleagues in other schools has been very successful, creating relationships across these schools. The Cluster can now begin to develop supports for each other in other areas of school development' (QD3)

'Teachers have release time, during school time to work on the project. This puts value on the project and incentivises teachers … The level of commitment allows people to be vested in the project and leads to rich sharing of ideas … how people do things in different contexts … collaboration.' (TID1)

'[S]chools coming together with different ideas, inspiring each other and sharing contacts, thus supporting each other for not only this project but for other areas of education and working together in a collaborative way. Teachers bonding and enjoying working together' (QD5)

5.7 Approaches to CPD

The Directors commented very favourably on the ways in which Creative Clusters fostered the development of 'professional dialogue and professional learning communities around creativity' (QD2). These Professional Learning Communities or PLCs (see 2.4) 'increased capacity in all schools that took part' (QD3). They also enabled:

- Teacher reflective dialogue
- Teacher-teacher collaboration
- The articulation of shared norms and goals
- A focus on pupil learning

This is illustrated in the following comments:

'Fantastic opportunity for collaboration, networking, learning, reflection on practice …' (QD4)

'Pre-planning, planning, interaction between participants and schools. The structure meant that there was genuine sharing, collaboration and a shared vested interest in the project succeeding.' (TID1)

'… fantastic, brings schools together. Amazing benefits for children. 'Schools that never worked together before coming together with a facilitator and formulating ideas. New relationships between schools. Exposed teachers to other teachers and ideas.' (TID4)

One Director also described how in one of the Implementers some of the finance provided by the initiative was used, in the first year, to fund two CPD sessions: one for nominated school representatives 'and a whole day for all staff in all five schools, including Special Needs Assistants, with Board of Management approval, and facilitated by the Education Centre' (TID3). Then, in the second year, when the teachers had gained confidence, they 'began to do their own CPD related to the project' (TID3). This exemplar illustrates one of the ways in which Creative Clusters enabled CPD that was continuous, sustained, and closely connected to the work of teachers in the classroom, which concurs with the approach to teacher CPD advocated by Ireland's Teaching Council (see 2.4).

5.8 Summary of findings from Director data sets

The Directors saw the Creative Clusters model as a highly effective model in terms of teacher CPD. The model enabled the development of Professional Learning Communities or PLCs over a two-year period, some of which had the potential to be sustained for longer. These PLCs were, moreover, focused on generating and implementing creative projects in clusters of schools and were, consequently, focused on student learning. Some PLCs also developed collaborations that involved the informal education sector. Finance and dedicated out of school release time for meetings and training were identified as key enablers of these PLCs, and of the cluster model. A highly skilled Creative Cluster Facilitator was also acknowledged as a key enabler. So too was a high level of commitment to the initiative by principals in participating schools. Principals, were, moreover, identified as key players when it came to embedding the creative processes supported by the initiative in schools. Given the significance of the roles played by Facilitators and principals in ensuring the success of projects, Directors faced an onerous task when it came to identifying committed principals and to nominating Facilitators with the requisite skills. The high turnover of Directors was identified as a particular challenge in this regard, since it takes considerable time for Directors to familiarise themselves with local personnel while simultaneously familiarising themselves with the many projects (local and national) for which the Education Support Centres are

responsible. In the case of Facilitator nomination, the problem was compounded by the fact that suitably skilled full-time teachers were not permitted to be Facilitators.

6. Key findings: Creative Cluster Facilitators

The key findings in this section are drawn from the responses of Creative Cluster Facilitators to the following:

- Creative Cluster Facilitator Online Questionnaire issued by researcher (coded as QF1, QF2 etc.)

- Telephone Interviews with four Creative Cluster Facilitators (coded as TIF1, TIF2 etc.)[6]

Out of a total of 31 Creative Cluster Facilitators, 16 responded to the questionnaire issued by the researcher, representing a response rate of 52%. Records provided by the National Arts in Education Administration Office at the Education Centre, Tralee show that only four of the 31 were involved with both Implementers and Adapters. Of the 16 Facilitators who responded to the online questionnaire, eight stated that they had been involved with Implementers and eight with Adapters. Of the four Creative Cluster Facilitators interviewed, one was a visual artist with over 10 years' experience in education, one was a teacher on career break, one had over 20 years' experience in drama facilitation and youth theatre, and one was (the only Facilitator to be) in a full-time teaching position.

The key findings from the online questionnaires and telephone interviews are presented under the following headings:

- The Creative Cluster Facilitators (6.1)

- Cluster model (6.2)

- Teaching, learning and the inclusion of pupil voice (6.3)

- Collaboration between formal and informal education sectors (6.4)

- Range of creative activities (6.5)

- Embedding the creative process (6.6)

- Approaches to CPD (6.7)

In the following sections, 6.2 through to 6.7, the findings from the Facilitators' questionnaire responses are followed by the findings from the four Facilitator telephone interviews.

---

[6] There is no known correspondence between the numbers assigned to the research participants in both data sets. For example, F1 in the Questionnaire and F1 in the Telephone Interviews do not necessarily indicate the same participant.

6.1 The Creative Cluster Facilitators

Of the sixteen Facilitators who responded to the online questionnaire seven described their principal area of expertise as education, which would suggest that they were teachers (retired or on career break). Four of the respondents identified their principal area of expertise as visual art, two as digital creativity, one as outdoors education, one as drama education and theatre and one as dance (see Figure 19).

Figure 19: Overview of Facilitator respondents' principal areas of expertise
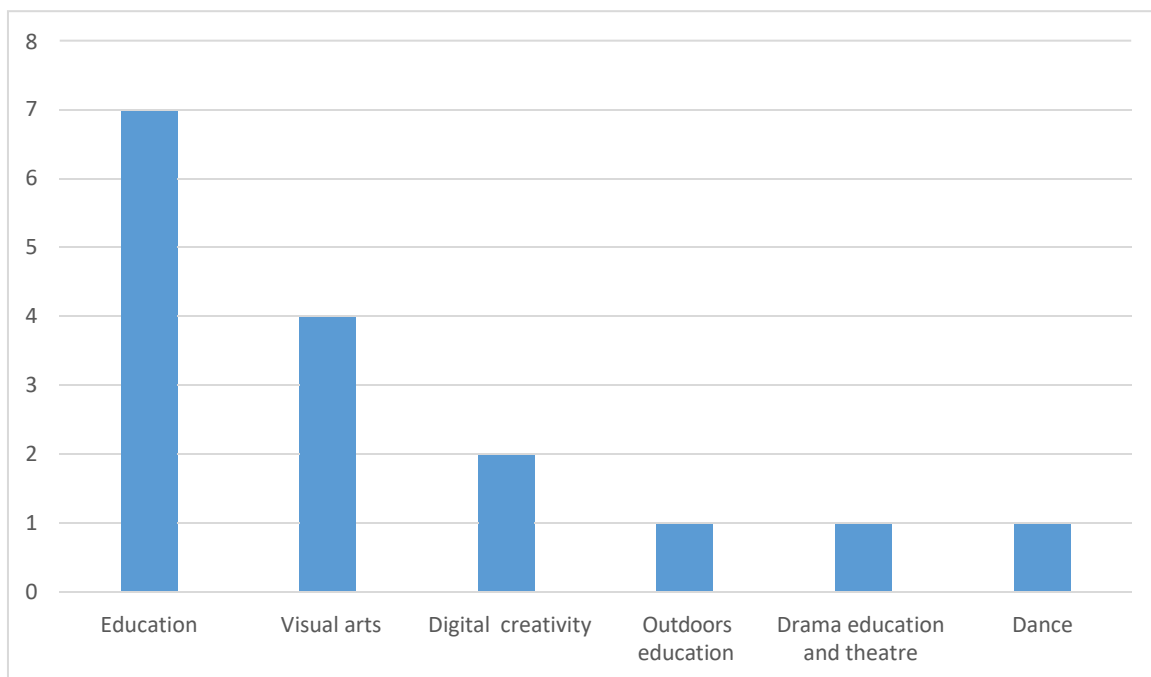
Of these 16 respondents, one did not respond to any other questions. Of the remaining 15, nine stated that they had been practising their principal area of expertise for more than 20 years, one for between 10 and 20 years, four for between five and 10 years and one for less than five years (see Figure 20).

Figure 20: Overview of years spent practising principal area of expertise
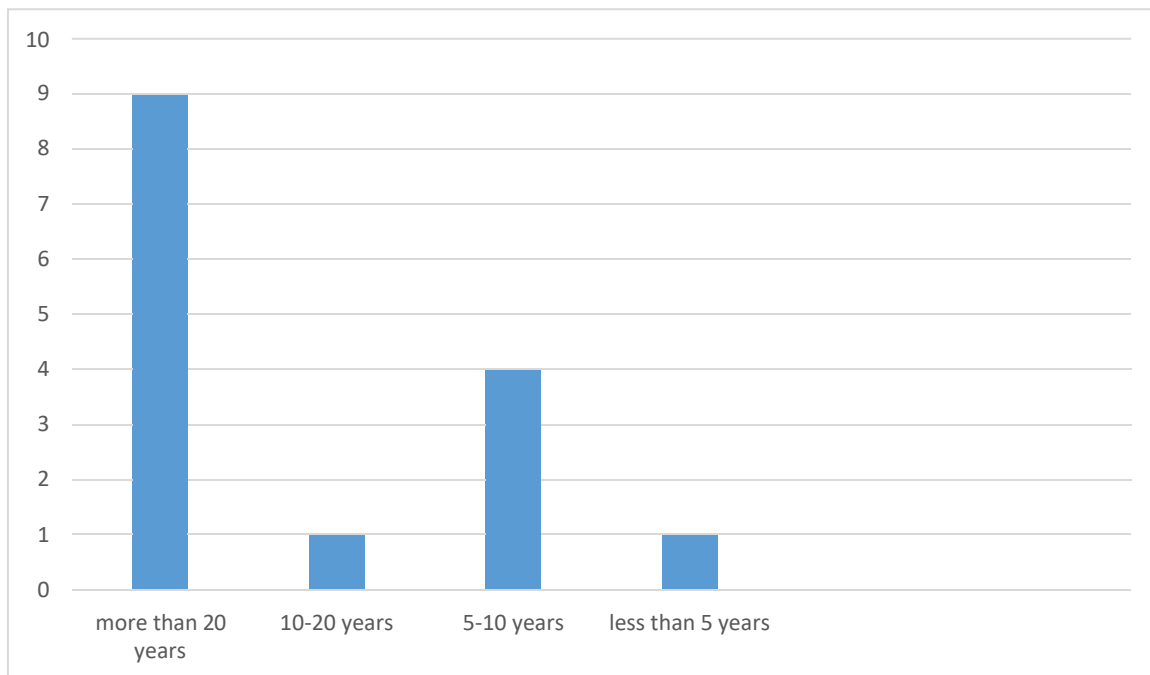
14 of these respondents had been approached, in the first instance, by the local Education Support Centre, in alignment with the Centres' role in the nomination of Facilitators. One Facilitator was, however, approached, in the first instance, by a teacher. These 15 respondents saw themselves as bringing a variety of skills to their role as Creative Cluster Facilitators, including subject specific skills, skills and expertise in education, and leadership and facilitation skills, as the following comments illustrate:

'Planning, local knowledge of artists available, first-hand experience of schools as a recently retired primary principal.' (QF2)

'I am competent with computers and technology in general.' (QF3)

'Leadership, coaching, knowledge of the primary sector and curriculum.' (QF5)

'My role is not to lead but to support, listen, enable and encourage … [being] open-minded and understanding of life in schools and the life of schools.' (QF7)

'Organised, patient, listener … principal for 24 years – 35 years a teacher.' (QF8)

'Good knowledge of practical and creative approaches to working on creative initiatives within a school setting.' (QF11)

'Knowledge of how schools work, an understanding of the encouragement of creativity within that context, personal creativity.' (QF12)

'Organisation, admin., knowledge of local artists.' (QF13)

'Practical outdoors skills, helping teachers to open their minds and discover the possibilities and resources available to them.' (QF15)

Most of the questionnaire respondents (11) felt that their role changed over time. Many (though not all) of the changes related directly to the challenges experienced by schools in relation to COVID-19. Some Facilitators found it difficult to motivate schools to reignite projects in the wake of the extended school closure. Some schools were unable to resume the projects they had been working on prior to the closure and began working on new ones. And still other schools neither resumed nor completed their projects. Meetings moved on- line, and Facilitators provided extra on-line, telephone and email supports to teachers.

Additionally, the telephone interviews showed the extent to which Facilitators needed to be both tenacious and resourceful. One of the interviewees, in her dealings with a less than committed Coordinator, revealed how:

'I was persistent. She was sick of me. I developed skills. I learned to be diplomatic, helpful more than authoritarian, approachable. It took a lot of time, work, heartbreak, chasing to finish, not able to finish properly but the first year finished with a bang.' (TIF1)

See also 6.2.2 for a further example, from the telephone interviews, of Facilitator tenacity and resourcefulness.

6.2 The Creative Cluster Facilitator and the Cluster model

Overall, the Facilitators, like the Education Support Centre Directors, saw the Cluster model as being effective.

6.2.1 Facilitators' perspectives on training for participation in Creative Clusters

All but one of the above mentioned 15 respondents received training for their role. This training was provided by the UK based Creativity Culture and Education or CCE (see 1.8). Of the 14 respondents who received training, nine rated the training as excellent, two as very good, and three as good (see Figure 21).

Figure 21: Evaluation of training provided for the role of Creative Cluster Facilitator

While some respondents appeared to be clear about the nature of their role as Facilitators from the outset, others felt that the training they received clarified it for them:

> 'Was not 100% sure [about the role] until training day.' (QF2)
>
> 'At the beginning, I thought I would facilitate actual hands-on projects, but it became clear after training that this wasn't the case.' (QF3)
>
> 'The training let us know that a willingness to be open was essential.' (QF5)

One respondent commented that the training enabled her/him to clarify the nature of the initiative for 'teachers who struggled initially to grasp … the expectations of Creative Clusters … [and as a result s/he] was able to help them work towards a very full and creative programme' (QF10). Another Facilitator found that one school's lack of understanding of the nature of the initiative meant that s/he took on 'less a facilitation role and more of an administration role' (QF6). So, despite the clarification, through training, for Facilitators of their role, there was considerable lack of clarity about the role, and the initiative itself in some clusters, as is further illustrated in the following comments:

> 'It took a long time to get clarity on the [Facilitator] role as this was not communicated to the schools/teachers involved. There were incorrect assumptions and expectations on their behalf of what my role could do for them.' (QF16)
>
> 'At times I wasn't sure what my purpose was or what others saw as my purpose. At times I thought participants saw me as a kind of inspector.' (QF2)
>
> 'Lead teachers had not familiarised themselves with the process and I found myself acting in an administrator's role on more than one occasion.' (QF3)
>
> 'Lack of clarity – all teachers involved should have been provided with clear info from start, an email would have sufficed. It wasted precious time getting everyone up to speed and adjusting expectations.' (QF5)

Additionally, two of the respondents felt that the training provided did not address their needs as Facilitators:

> 'The training was good but didn't fit the reality which involved trying to get meetings organised, quietly influencing people to come to consensus.' (QF11)
>
> 'I think more practice-based engagements, case-studies, would have been useful' (QF12)

The need for greater clarity around the role of the Creative Cluster Facilitator was reiterated in the telephone interviews:

> 'The role of the Creative Cluster Facilitator could have been clearer. I thought there'd be less admin and more discussion or facilitation … The training days were great but didn't explain the nitty gritty of being a Creative Cluster Facilitator. Schools saw my role as administrative.' (TIF2)
>
> 'The roles of the Creative Cluster Facilitator and the Creative Cluster Coordinator (CCC) could have been clearer. There was some blurriness … This [clarity] needs to be provided in training, which needs to advise people to be mindful of communication, to answer e-mails within a time frame.' (TIF1)

The interviewees also spoke about the lack of clarity among teachers about the initiative itself, as exemplified in the following comment:

> 'The small schools in this cluster didn't really understand what they were getting into …
> [lured by] the offer of cash but didn't realise the amount of work.' (TIF2)

One interviewee emphasised that training needed to provide clarity for everyone about their roles and responsibilities and to 'advise people to be mindful of communication' (TIF1). Another interviewee saw the application process itself as contributing to the lack of clarity as forms had been filled in, 'while up to your eyes', and projects decided on without consulting with pupils. It was only subsequently, in training, that 'the centrality of the voice of the child in Creative Clusters' became apparent and by this time projects had already been 'fixed' (TIF4).

6.2.2 The Facilitator, Coordinator, Principal, Education Support Centre Director nexus

The Facilitators' principal point of contact with each cluster was through the Creative Cluster Coordinator (see 1.6). In clusters comprising small schools, this role tended to be held by a school principal (see also 5.2.1). The Creative Cluster Coordinator was identified by one Facilitator as 'central to the success of projects' (QF12) and training was provided for Coordinators and Lead Teachers in each Cluster early in the academic year. Nine of the Facilitators rated their experience with Coordinators as excellent, four as very good, and two as good (see Figure 22).

Figure 22: Experience with Creative Cluster Coordinator
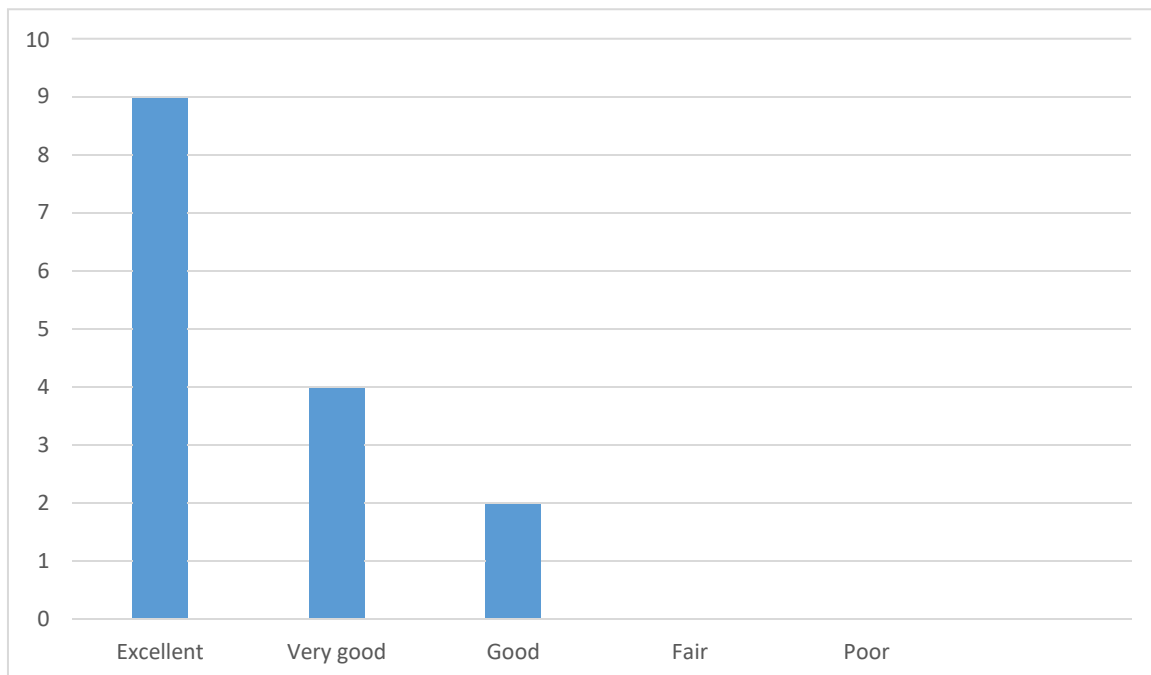
Since the Coordinators in small schools were often principals, some of the Facilitators' comments on the Coordinator and principal roles overlap. Two of the Facilitators felt that training clarified both the Coordinator and Facilitator roles for them. Most of the Facilitators identified good Facilitator-Coordinator communication and commitment to sharing the workload as key to the smooth running of projects, with one Facilitator noting that 'the more involved … [the Coordinators] were, the better the project progressed' (QF6). Conversely, lack of involvement on the Coordinator's part, or lack of clarity about what s/he had signed up to, meant that Facilitators ended up either 'dragging them [the Coordinators] along' or enlisting support from other participating teachers (QF13). Although the Facilitators saw the Coordinator as key to the success of projects, they also underlined the necessity of principal support. Four of the Facilitators rated support for the initiative in schools as excellent, seven as very good, three as good and two as fair (see Figure 23).

Figure 23: Facilitators' perspectives on support for Creative Clusters in schools
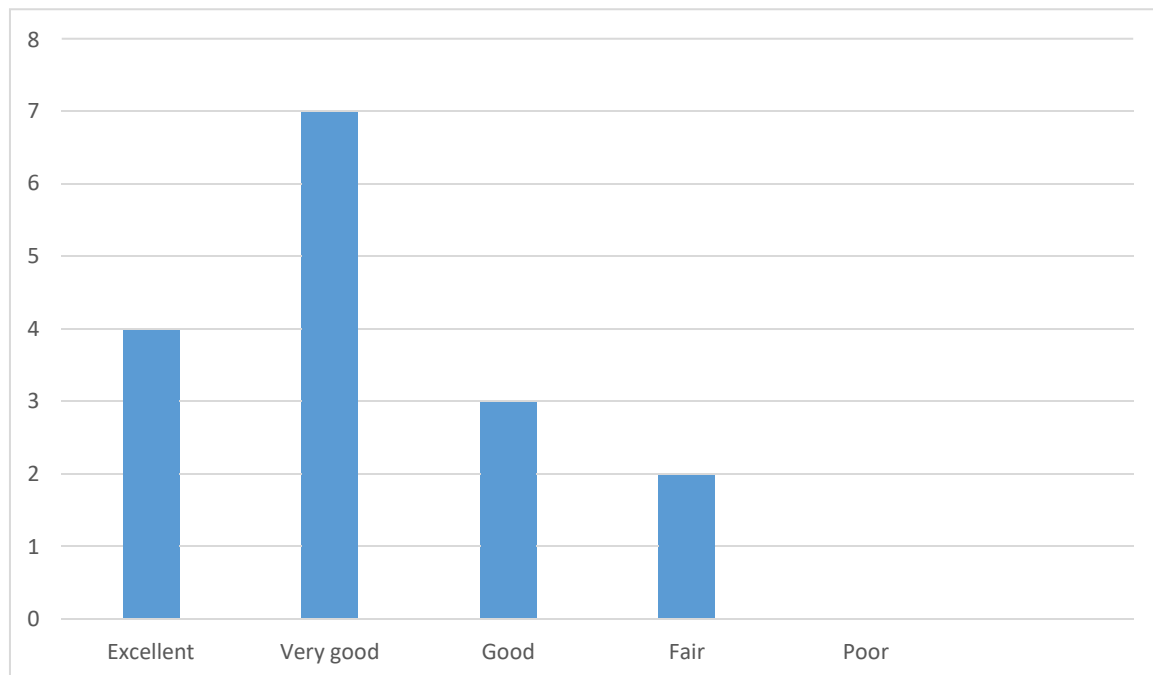
The Facilitator Telephone Interviews provide more in-depth insight into the Facilitator-Coordinator-Principal-Education Support Centre Director nexus. One of the interviewees, who facilitated two Clusters, one with a high-functioning Coordinator and the other with a poorly functioning Coordinator (who was also a school principal), described the challenges posed by the latter:

'The Coordinator put the application forward and asked in other schools but didn't want to do the work. It was the prestige for the school that mattered. A teacher in the school was expected to do the work but didn't attend the training or go to meetings. Nothing was democratically chosen. A teacher from another school ended up doing the Coordinator work.' (TIF1)

The problem was exacerbated, according to the interviewee, by the position of power held by the Coordinator as principal. However, whether or not the principal was the Coordinator, full principal buy-in was considered by the interviewees as essential:

'The Lead Teacher in the third school didn't have the full support of the principal and the principal did not really understand the project. The principal appointed the Lead who was enthusiastic and committed but wasn't in a position to push the project in her school as she didn't have a post.' (TIF4)

Principal buy-in was, moreover, identified as essential not just within a school but to the smooth functioning of the Cluster as a whole, as the following comment illustrates:

> 'There was a change of principal in one of the schools … That held things up … The outgoing principal had been involved in the original application and had delegated it to an Acting Deputy who had not been involved and had no vested interest. The other schools … were coming under pressure.' (TIF2)

This interviewee suggested that there should be contingency plans in place to deal with such inevitable changes in personnel. S/he also suggested that there should be an initial meeting with principals:

> '…to ensure understanding of the project and a grounding in what is happening … A designated day for principals, even a webinar, is essential.' (TIF2)

The webinar was proposed as a way of addressing the perceived reluctance (exacerbated by the lack of available substitute teachers in the case of teaching principals) among both administrative and teaching principals to attend out-of-school training events.

One interviewee – reiterating the need for greater clarity in relation to the Facilitator and Coordinator roles – suggested that when it came to addressing the issue of poorly functioning Coordinators, a more hierarchical model, in terms of roles, was required:

> 'When the Coordinator was not taking personal responsibility, the absence of a hierarchy in the roles made it difficult for the Facilitator to move things on. The Facilitator was referred to the Education Centre Director, but the Director doesn't have any authority. Somebody needs to have the authority, probably the Education Centre Director. Because when the Coordinator has a position of power in the school it is difficult.' (TIF1)

However, as the Director data sets show, the ongoing turnover of Directors means that Directors may not always have the requisite knowledge of the initiative, the project, or the personnel involved to fulfil such a role effectively. Indeed, one of the Facilitator interviewees described how the model was negatively impacted, at more basic levels, when the Education Support Centre Director was not up to speed:

> 'I was very much on my own. The Director was not informed and looked to me … not even dealing with the Director … not up to speed …impossible to get a reply. There was no clear

guidance from the Director. I had to explain to the Director how to get paid. It was frustrating so I went to a personal contact in administration at another Centre and to the Creative Clusters Administrator in Tralee … There were difficulties establishing a Cluster. I had to fit training and support into three days … Crammed. Working from a deficit. One of the three schools only participated in two of the days.' (TIF3)

Significantly, this Facilitator's tenacity and resourcefulness combined with a pre-existing working relationship with a 'very organised' Coordinator enabled the project to be successfully advanced.

6.2.3 Teachers as Facilitators

Of the four Facilitators interviewed, two were teachers, one on career-break and the other in a full-time teaching position. The latter situation was not permitted by the initiative but the 'Education Centre Director at the time did not have access to anyone else she felt had the skills for the role' (TIF4). This Facilitator felt that, as a practising teacher s/he was ideally placed to take on the role of Facilitator; she understood the various competing demands on teachers and she understood that, despite provision for substitute cover for training and meetings, there was a dearth of available substitute teachers in the area. So, in consultation with teachers, s/he organised a series of short, two-hour, after-school Cluster meetings in a local hotel in 2018/19, which worked for everyone logistically and geographically. It also enabled Cluster participants 'to probe and learn from each other on an ongoing basis' (TIF4). The feasibility of having a full-time teacher in the role of Facilitator was, moreover, corroborated by a Facilitator on career-break from her teaching position:

'The Creative Cluster Coordinator was really invested and motivated the others … Schools could quite happily have worked together with that Coordinator, without the Facilitator. Then the Facilitator could have been a conduit for more clusters.' (TIF2)

6.3 Teaching, learning and the inclusion of pupil voice

In their responses to the questionnaire, the Facilitators commented very favourably on the opportunities for teaching and learning afforded by the initiative, identifying the inclusion of pupil voice as integral to many of these opportunities. They identified specific skills (some project dependent), learnt by teachers and students alike, such as coding skills, documentary making skills, thinking skills, interpersonal skills, expressive skills, artistic skills, and skills

pertaining to environmental care. They also noted the impact on pupil learning when teachers learned 'to listen to their pupils' (QF15):

'To put the child's voice in the forefront of decision making.' (QF2)

'Their VOICES were central at all times, from the outset. They are and were the real creative partners in all of this, and the teachers were collaborators in creative activities designed for meaningful learning.' (QF7)

'In all cases the children were part of the planning process and were consulted about every decision.' (QF10)

'The students were central. It was their questions which were the basis of the science experiments. They developed their own experiments. They were in charge at the showcases – displaying, explaining and performing' (QF12)

For some teachers, the inclusion of pupil voice meant, as one Facilitator put it, an 'adjustment of thinking in relation to teaching and learning' (QF3). The comments in the above text box highlight classroom talk and discussion as the primary means of including pupil voice, but the Facilitators identified many others, including student councils, committees and sub-committees, brainstorming, class and whole school voting procedures, surveys, interviews and being invited to teach other pupils. The inclusion of pupil voice was not, according to some Facilitators, always achieved to the degree represented in the textbox above. The facilitators, nevertheless, observed that through engaging in a variety of peer to peer, inter-class, inter-school, and inter-organisational collaborations, children developed listening and collaborative skills. Additionally, they saw these collaborations as extending opportunities for learning beyond individual classrooms and schools, and into communities, as the following responses show:

'Learning that there is a whole other world outside of their own school walls with others who are willing to share their skills and interests.' (QF8)

'Benefits of looking outside the classroom, school, at the local community, surroundings and linking them to allow the children to experience art in their own environment and beyond.' (QF14)

> 'Interactions between second and primary level and sharing of skills, experience, and resources. Everyone has opportunity to learn from each other.' (QF16)

While some teachers readily embraced, and were perhaps already embracing, the inclusion of pupil voice, most, according to the Facilitators, appeared to make progress regarding its inclusion. One Facilitator commented that Cluster participants would, nevertheless, have benefitted from some training in the area.

6.4 Collaboration between formal and informal education sectors

In their responses to the questionnaire, the Facilitators acknowledged that collaborations between formal and informal education sectors had taken place. Their comments, however, tended to be phrased in general rather than specific terms. The more specific comments are presented in the following textbox:

> 'Schools engaged with local … historians and creative professionals.' (QF5)
>
> 'Community organisations and schools: providing free venues for schools to hold collaboration day.' (QF9)
>
> 'Collaboration … [with] men's sheds.' (QF14)

6.4.1 Collaboration between schools

In their questionnaire responses, the Facilitators commented more explicitly and extensively on inter-school collaboration than on collaboration between formal and informal education sectors. The inter-school collaborations they commented on include collaborations between primary schools and between primary and post-primary schools:

> 'One junior, and one senior primary school joined a transition year to form coding clubs in each school. Each group taught or were taught on a weekly basis. TY students came to the senior primary school and senior primary students came to the junior primary school. The students shared, learned, coded and boded with the other coders.' (QF3)
>
> 'The schools worked well together across primary and secondary, different patronages and Gaelscoil/English medium schools.' (QF5)

> 'Communities of practice collaborating on so many creative and innovative levels from film to herbs, from art to tech, from teachers providing CPD to others, sharing so much without question. Students love the Initiative.' (QF6)
>
> 'What was really wonderful was how they shared equipment, books and ideas so readily. They shared their knowledge about the availability of these and where was the best value etc. The group gelled unbelievably well. There were many different strengths among the participants and this was a real positive, because each person was willing to share their expertise.' (QF9)
>
> 'A project involving two primary and one post-primary school collaborating in science. Centrally, the sixth-class children were guided to develop science experiments to answer their own questions with help from post-primary pupils and teachers and the use of the labs in the post-primary and showcasing this to the wider community.' (QF12)

These comments highlight what the Facilitators saw as the benefits of the inter-school collaborations facilitated by Creative Clusters. One of the interviewees also described how these benefits extended into collaborations with the informal education sector as well:

> 'Teachers come together talking about things they would not talk to anyone else about. Teachers, especially primary school teachers, work alone and don't share their own learning experiences or the learning experiences of the children. Devising together and sharing experiences makes everything magic … Everybody has their own contacts, cultural institutions and artists. When people come together, they pool their contacts so there's a bigger pool for everyone to draw on … Sharing of resources makes economic sense too, you get more out of the money spent. If an artist visits two schools s/he will charge less to each school than if s/he was to visit just one school.' (TIF1)

6.5 Range of creative activities

The Facilitators corroborated the range of creative activities described in the Planning Model Documents (see 4). They also described how some of these activities developed and changed over time and in response to the restrictions imposed due to COVID-19. They emphasised, moreover, the significance of collaboration within and between schools and with arts and cultural organisations in extending the range of creative activities in schools.

6.6 Embedding the creative process

The Facilitators identified the principal as they key enabler in embedding the creative process in schools. They also identified the time provided by Creative Clusters for the development of professional relationships as a key enabler. Additionally, the finance provided to schools for human and material resources was seen as significant.

6.7 Approaches to CPD

In their questionnaire responses, the Facilitators commented very favourably on the ways in which Creative Clusters fostered the development of Professional Learning Communities, or PLCs, in which teachers collaborated and engaged in dialogue with each other towards furthering their students' learning. Within the PLCs, the teachers also engaged in CPD activities, facilitated both by external professionals and by each other. Some teachers too attended workshops with their pupils.

> 'In one of the projects there was a CPD course to embed the techniques in the teaching in both schools … In the other cluster the teachers attended the different workshops with the children so learned visual arts, puppetry, drama …' (QF3)
>
> 'Certainly learned to look outside their own schools and link with other schools in their communities. They shared various IT skills and talents in music and art.' (QF14)

See also 6.3 for a description of the opportunities afforded by Creative Clusters for extending teachers' repertoire of skills, most especially in relation to the inclusion of pupil voice.

6.8 Summary of findings from Facilitator questionnaire responses and interviews

The Facilitators saw the Creative Clusters model as a highly effective model in terms of teacher CPD. They observed that the model enabled the professional learning of teachers in Professional Learning Communities focused on including pupil voice in the creative process. Additionally, they attested to the resultant empowering impact on pupils themselves. They also documented the wide range of creative skills developed by teachers and pupils alike with learning opportunities extending beyond classrooms and schools and into communities, often involving collaborations with the informal education sector. Finance and dedicated out of school release time for meetings were identified as key enablers. The lack of availability of substitute cover was identified as a barrier to the latter, which prior to the advent of COVID-

19 were scheduled to take place at the local Education Support Centre (and subsequently on ZOOM). A highly skilled, tenacious, and resourceful Creative Cluster Facilitator was also acknowledged as a key enabler, and it was observed that this role could, in certain circumstances, be filled by a full-time teacher. Principals, were, moreover, identified as key players when it came to enabling the cluster model in schools. Indeed, the success of the model was seen as highly dependent on principal buy-in, prompting one Facilitator to suggest that bespoke training needed to be provided for principals. In small schools, principals also tended to be Creative Cluster Coordinators or nominated school representatives, which, when they were committed to the initiative, put them in a strong position in terms of driving the project in their schools. However, in the absence of full commitment, this had a negative impact not just on the principal's own school but on the entire cluster. While the Facilitators were mostly more than satisfied with the training they received, they felt that training needed to provide greater clarity on their role and that of the Creative Cluster Coordinator. They also felt that the training for Coordinators and nominated school representatives needed to provide this same clarity while, at the same time, ensuring that participants (and school principals) received clear guidance on the nature of the initiative itself. Some Facilitators felt that schools applied to participate in Creative Clusters without being clear about what was entailed and without a clear understanding of what was meant by the inclusion of pupil voice. The negative impact of the high systemic turnover of Teachers'/Education Centre Directors was acutely felt by one of the Facilitators interviewed, while the positive experience of another (with a Director who had been in place for over two years) prompted her/him to call for a role for Directors in dealing with Coordinators/Principals who were not fulfilling their obligations.

7. Key findings: Teachers

The key findings in this section are drawn from teachers' responses to an Online Questionnaire issued by the researcher (coded as QT1, QT2 etc.). The questionnaire was issued to all 253 teachers identified by the National Arts in Education Administration Office in the Education Centre, Tralee as participants in the Implementer and Adapter Clusters. The names and email addresses of these participants – which included Creative Cluster Coordinators, nominated school representatives, Principals, and other participating teachers – were provided by the National Arts in Education Administration Office. The key findings from the online questionnaire are presented under the following headings:

- The teachers (7.1)
- Cluster model (7.2)
- Teaching, learning and the inclusion of pupil voice (7.3)
- Collaboration between formal and informal education sectors (7.4)
- Range of creative activities (7.5)
- Embedding the creative process (7.6)
- Approaches to CPD (7.7)

7.1 The teachers

Of the 253 teachers to whom the online questionnaire was issued, 61 responded. This represents a response rate of just over 24%. All but one of the respondents identified their role/s in Creative Clusters, as follows (See also Figure 24):

- Principals (11)
- Principals who were also Creative Cluster Coordinators (4)
- Principals who were also nominated school representatives (2)
- Principals who were participating teachers (2)
- Creative Cluster Coordinators (10)
- Nominated school representatives (19)
- Participating teachers (12)

Figure 24: Overview of role/s of teacher respondents
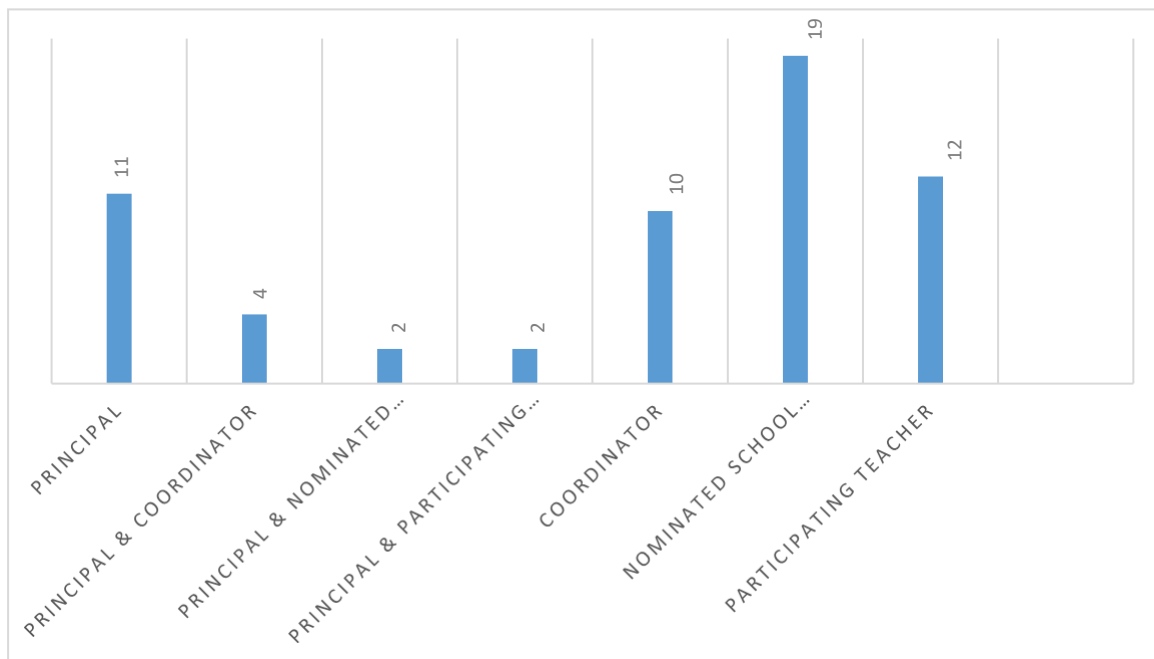
Of the respondents, 23 (38.3%) stated that they participated in Implementer Clusters (beginning in 2018/19) and 37 (61.7%) stated that they participated in Adapters (beginning in 2019/20). One did not state whether s/he participated in an Implementer or an Adapter (See Figure 25).

Figure 25: Percentage breakdown of respondents' involvement in Implementer or Adapter Clusters

In which academic year did you begin participating in Creative Clusters?
60 responses

● 2018/19
● 2019/20

61.7%

38.3%
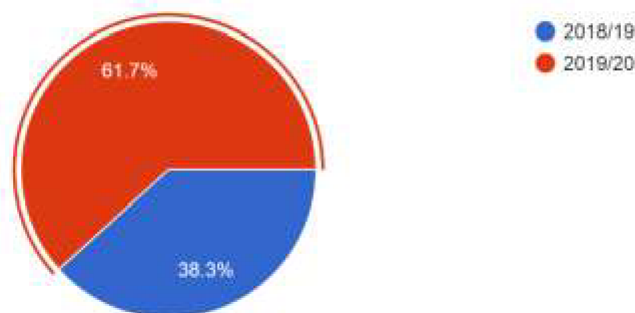
Of the 61 questionnaire respondents, all but one specified the length of time they had been teaching. 32 (53.3%) had been teaching for more than 20 years and 18 (30%) for between 10 and 20 years. This means that 50 (83.3%) of the respondents were teaching for more than

ten years. A full breakdown of the number of years the respondents had been teaching is presented in Figure 26.

Figure 26: Number of years teaching

How many years have you been a teacher?
60 responses
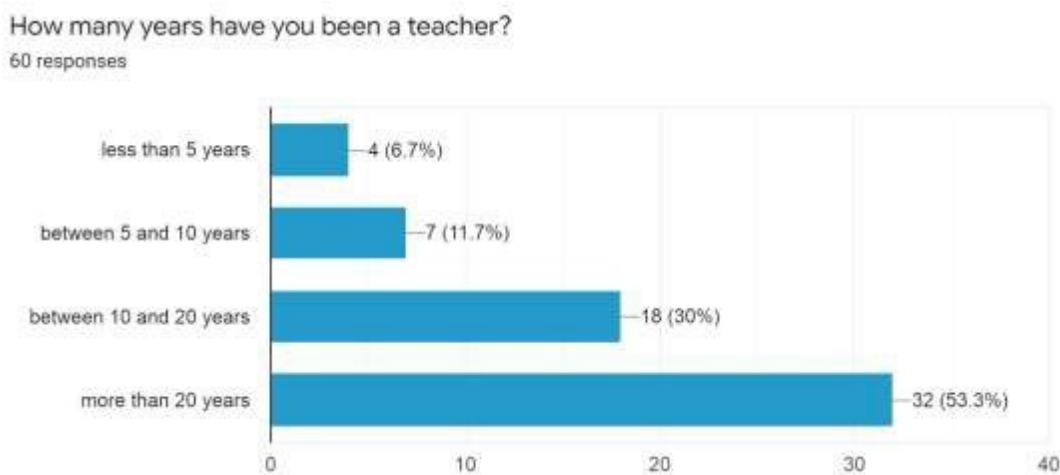
The respondents presented a variety of reasons for wishing to participate in Creative Clusters. The principal reason cited was the desire to promote creativity, the arts and STEAM, and the fact that there was finance offered by the initiative to do so. The possibilities afforded by the initiative for collaboration with other teachers and schools also featured strongly. Many teachers saw participation in Creative Clusters as an opportunity to build on existing work or to actualise projects they had already been considering:

'It naturally fit with the Vex robotics project we have been involved in.' (QT14)

'We have a huge interest in drama across the school. All teachers teach drama in their classrooms, but we are always looking for fresh ideas and ways to develop our skills. A lot of drama teaching can often be quite product based and we wanted to really explore "process drama". When the opportunity arose to participate in Creative Clusters it was quickly snapped up … it was a great opportunity' (QT30)

'The idea was attractive and fitted the bill for a project we had in mind.' (QT31)

Additionally, a significant number of teachers stated that they had been invited by teachers/principals in other schools or by the principal in their own school to participate. One

teacher also stated that s/he had been invited to participate in Creative Clusters by the local Education Support Centre Director.

7.2 Teachers and the Cluster model

7.2.1 Teachers' perspectives on training for participation in Creative Clusters

Of the 61 respondents, all but one specified whether or not they had received training, with 40 (66.7%) stating that they had, and 20 (33.3%) stating that they had not (See Figure 27).

Figure 27: Training

These figures, though not necessarily representative of all teachers participating in Creative Clusters go some way towards explaining the initial lack of understanding of the initiative among teachers identified by Facilitators on the ground. Of the 19 principals who responded to the questionnaire, 10 (52.6%) recorded that they received training prior to participating in Creative Clusters and 9 (48.4%) that they did not. Of the nine principals who did not receive training, three were also Creative Cluster Coordinators. These figures too, illuminate Facilitator comments on the need for principals, given the significance of their role in the initiative, to be informed about the nature of Creative Clusters from the outset. Since all but one of the 10 Coordinators who were not principals received training, it appears that such Coordinators were more likely to attend training than were Coordinator/principals. Of the 19 nominated school representatives who were neither Coordinators nor principals, fifteen received training and four did not. So, of the 48 respondents who were principals, Coordinators or nominated school representatives, 34 (70.8%) received training and 14 (29.2%) did not. Of the 12 participating teachers, who were not principals, Coordinators or nominated school representatives, eight received training and four did not. Although 40

respondents stated that they had received training prior to engaging in Creative Clusters, 42 rated their experience of the training they received (training may have been provided subsequently by a Facilitator as described in 6.2.2). Of those 42 respondents, 16 (38.1%) rated their training as excellent, 17 (40.5%) rated it as very good, eight (19%) as good, and one (2.4%) as fair (see Figure 28).

Figure 28: Evaluation of training provided for teachers
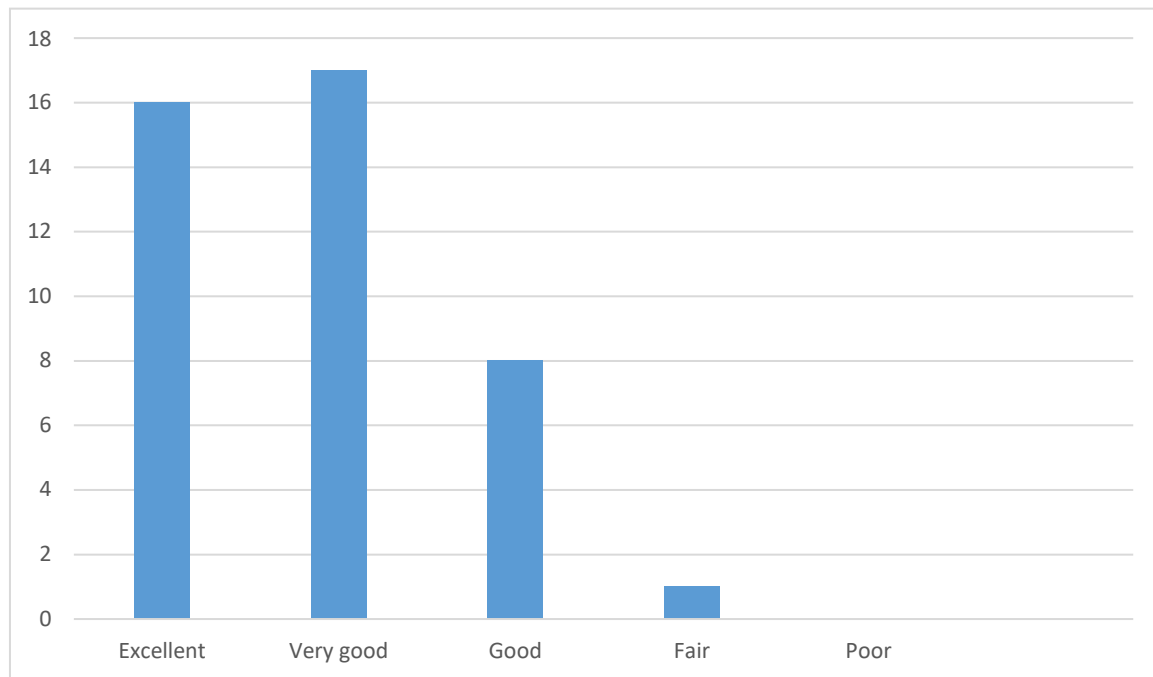
A selection of the respondents' recommendations re training are presented in the following textbox:

'I felt I left the training not knowing what I had to do or feeling inspired. I felt like we needed some video examples of other processes and some structure.' (QT35)

'Practical advice on how to develop the clusters … more. We found this part quite hard to incorporate into the project.' (QT55)

'Perhaps some of the training day could involve hearing of projects that have already been tried. There was a huge amount of uncertainty among teachers on that day about what exactly we were taking on, and not all of that uncertainty had been removed by the end of the day.' (QT1)

7.2.2 The Cluster model on the ground

Most of the respondents were very positive about their experiences with the Creative Cluster Facilitator. Of the 57 who rated their experience with the Facilitator, 42 (73.7%) rated the experience as excellent, 10 as very good, three as good and two as fair (see Figure 29.)

Figure 29: Experience with Creative Cluster Facilitator
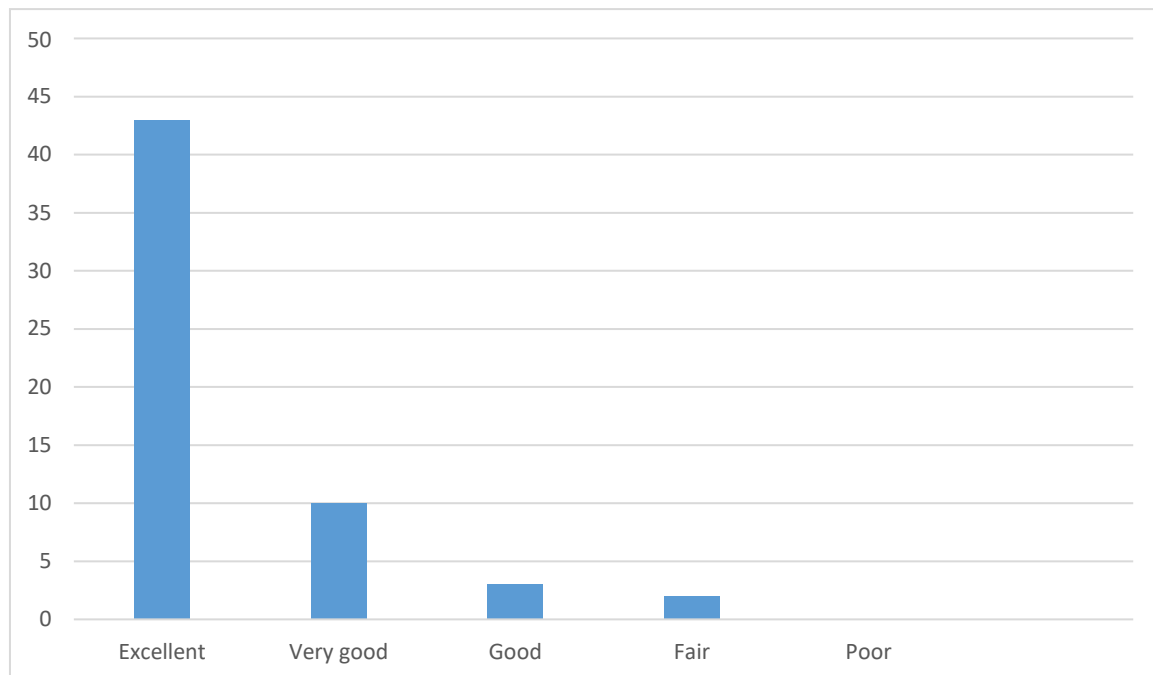
Additionally, most of the comments relating to the Facilitator were very positive, as exemplified in the selection below:

'Warm, motivated, committed deeply to creativity and available.' (QT16)

'Very committed and dedicated. Great attention to detail, adapting to the school closure and finding a way to continue … remotely. Lots of preparation in her own time.' (QT32)

'He was inspiring to say the least! His enthusiasm and belief in the value of the STEM approach was infectious! Also, he allowed the teachers within the group to take charge of the project and did not dictate at any stage. He was there when we wanted advice and assistance and appreciated the challenges faced by teachers …' (QT61)

In these comments, the effectiveness of the Facilitator is linked to her/his facilitation skills and systems knowledge. However, some respondents also questioned the need for a Facilitator in some clusters:

Most of the respondents were very positive about the support for Creative Clusters within schools. Of the 58 respondents who rated that support, 37 (63.8%) rated it as excellent, 14 (24.1%) as very good and 7 (12.1%) as good (see Figure 30).

Figure 30: Teachers' perspectives on support for Creative Clusters in schools

These ratings are elaborated on in the following selection of comments:

> treated as high priority in our school and generated a lot of enthusiasm and interest in our school community.' (QT2)
>
> 'All principals were on board and happy to facilitate all aspects of the project.' (QT10)
>
> 'Management and other teachers and parents were 100% behind the programme …My principal saw it as a wonderful idea from day one. Everyone was very welcoming to the artists and management was very supportive in arranging the hall time slots to accommodate workshops … Teachers in the staffroom were very enthusiastic and interested in the programme.' (QT30)

These comments further illustrate the importance of principal buy-in, in terms of engendering whole school support for the initiative and embedding it in schools. Most of the respondents reported the involvement of multiple classes in a school and some, the involvement of whole (smaller) schools. In addition, 55 of 59 respondents reported that participation in the initiative generated cross-curricular impact (see Figure 31).

Figure 31: Cross-curricular impact

Has participation in Creative Clusters generated cross-curricular impact?
59 responses

● Yes
● No

93.2%

Most respondents cited in-school and inter-school collaboration (between schools at the same level and between primary and post-primary schools) as the principal benefit of Creative Clusters, for both teachers and students. This is exemplified in the following selected comments:

> 'Collaboration with other educators and potential to work with children in other schools.' (QT12)

'Links to other schools and teachers, sharing expertise and the chance for 6th class students to become familiar with the secondary school.' (QT13)

'It really made us think about our school and how we can improve it. It allowed us to make links with other schools and community groups, which we had not collaborated with before. We hope to continue this collaboration.' (QT50)

The finance that enabled these collaborations to occur was also cited by the respondents as a significant benefit. So too was the time and space provided, within school hours, for these collaborations to be sustained. The principal challenge identified by the respondents centred on time, which was severely curtailed by the school closures that resulted from COVID-19. Respondents also referred to administrative difficulties, particularly in relation to drawing down finance in 2018/19. They acknowledged, however, that most of these difficulties had been addressed by the second year. Additionally, the lack of available substitute cover for attendance at training and meetings was identified as a significant challenge. Cluster Coordinators and nominated school representatives also commented on the additional workload attached to those roles, particularly when it came to communicating with artists, who, because of other commitments, often took a long time to respond to emails etc.

The respondents made few comments about the Education Support Centres, aside from stating that cluster meetings were held there. While some teachers felt that schools should have the option of hosting cluster meetings themselves, on a rotational basis, more felt that it was 'essential' to hold them away from schools. In addition, two Centres (the Directors of which had been in place for over two years) were singled out repeatedly for the hands-on practical and administrative support provided throughout.

7.3 Teaching, learning and the inclusion of pupil voice

Teachers commented very favourably on the opportunities for teaching and learning afforded by Creative Clusters, identifying inter-school collaboration – facilitated by the finance, time and space provided by the initiative – as a key enabler in this regard (see also 7.2). The teachers identified a range of skills (some project specific) that they and their students developed due to their participation in Creative Clusters. These included collaborative and team-work skills, listening skills, flexibility, problem-solving skills, observational skills, coding skills, IT skills, artistic skills and skills related to the curation and display of art and other works.

Teachers also observed that their understanding of creativity had been broadened and extended beyond the arts to include all subjects and even everyday activities. They reported too, that they had learnt to value the creative process as much as the product. A selection of teachers offered the following elaborations on the impact of participation in Creative Clusters on student learning:

'The classroom came alive … Their enthusiasm was so prevalent as this wasn't 'something the teacher is asking us to do', but rather it was a creation and invention … of their own ideas.' (QT2)

'We discovered hidden talents in a few students as one not revealed he made his own forge and makes his own swords and various things. Other children were trained up as trainee blacksmiths during the two-day workshops' (QT5)

'They were happier and more involved when they had ownership of the project.' (QT18)

The teachers also attested to increased pupil confidence, greater willingness to take risks and make mistakes, and to learn from their mistakes. They attributed these skills to pupil ownership of the project and the concomitant centrality to the project of pupil voice:

'Their voice was to the very forefront … they have made all the decisions along the way as it is their project. We had survey, debates, emails, FaceTime calls and WhatsApp messages between the schools and the teachers to ensure that each child's opinion and contributions was integrated into this project.' (QT2)

'We brainstormed at a class level. They then brainstormed in their groups. 6th class was completely child led (bar the printing). The middle classes were given the idea for their projects and then worked together at a class and group level to discuss how to make it individual to them.' (QT46)

'Children were engaged in project from beginning, they decided and chose the project. We felt if they had ownership of the project, they would be more enthusiastic and willing to be involved.' (QT55)

Some teachers also noted that for student voice to be meaningfully integrated, students sometimes needed to be taught domain specific skills in the first instance, for example, coding

skills or animation skills. Some teachers too, found it challenging, at the outset, to hand over control to their students. As one teacher put it:

> 'We were as teachers, challenged to hand over much of the decision-making to the pupils in terms of the direction the project would take, and this has helped us realise the benefits of trusting pupils to steer their learning direction.' (QT1)

As the initiative progressed, teachers learnt to embrace the inclusion of pupil voice as a logical extension of the larger, inter-school and inter-institutional collaborative process in which they too were co-participants. Indeed, the fact that Creative Clusters took teachers out of their comfort zones was reiterated by many as one of the strengths of the initiative. One teacher remarked that:

> 'We tend to be creatures of comfort and usually aren't too self-assured to try new ideas. This project put teachers out of their comfort zones and this, I believe, made them stronger and more competent teachers' (Q55)

50, out of 58, teachers stated that participating in Creative Clusters enabled them to use more creative pedagogies (see Figure 32).

Figure 32: Use of creative pedagogies

Has participation in Creative Clusters enabled the use of creative pedagogies?
58 responses

- Yes
- No

13.8%

86.2%
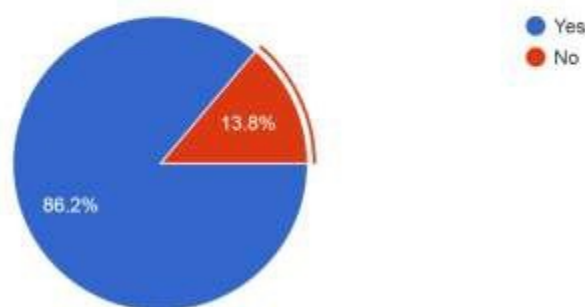
Among the creative pedagogies enabled, teachers reported the following:

- Adapting their teaching to accommodate the inclusion of pupils as decision makers
- Collaborative learning
- Incidental learning

- Context-based learning
- Exploratory learning
- Encouraging questioning
- Kinaesthetic methods
- Positioning pupils as both problem posers and problem solvers
- Positioning pupils as researchers, collecting, analysing, and representing data
- Using the arts as part of everyday classroom activities

7.4 Collaboration between formal and informal education sectors

7.4.1 Collaboration between primary and post-primary schools

Most of the respondents, as exemplified above (in 7.2), cited in-school and inter-school collaboration as the principal benefit of Creative Clusters. They attested to the benefits of both primary school and primary-post-primary collaborations, with the latter represented in the following textbox (see also 7.2):

My robot team was … building a robot for a game at a higher level. These students were novices … By mentoring the primary school team, my students, because they had to learn the simpler robot build concepts and game strategy to help the younger team … translated these [simpler concepts] into design strategies for their more complex robot build. They observed younger students' imaginative bravery and lack of fear of failure, which encouraged them to take more risks with their own project.' (QT14)

'Our main issue was to build a relationship with the local secondary school and ease transition from primary school to secondary and I feel we have achieved that.' (QT18)

'Our Creative Cluster of five schools (four primary, one secondary) chose to participate in the ESB Science Blast which culminated in a day trip to the RDS, Dublin. Our project, HOW CAN WE MAKE THE BOGS OF ROSCOMMON HAPPIER? Involved collaboration (in the science laboratory) with the TY students from the local secondary school. This was a fabulous experience for the 6th class who will transition to that school.' (QT52)

Teachers commented too, on the ways in which inter-primary school collaborations supported transition to post-primary school, as students forged relationships, via Creative

Clusters, with their future classmates. One teacher also described the impact of a collaboration between special and mainstream schools:

'As a special school, it was great to work with both a primary and a post-primary school. The focus of our project was inclusion through the creative arts which enabled students from the three schools to participate, regardless of ability. There was a great spirit of cooperation and mutual support with the transition year students in the post primary school assuming a 'mentor' type role, supporting the younger and sometimes less able students. In this way, all participants could have ownership of the project and it was a really collaborative effort. It gave the mainstream students insight into some of the difficulties and challenges that their peers in a special school face and how they might be supported or assisted in an appropriate empathetic way. The tasks involved were easily differentiated so that all students could participate at their own level of ability and it was an exciting project to work on for all involved.' (QT47)

Additionally, some teachers referred to collaborations with third-level education providers on STEM/STEAM related projects.

7.4.2 Collaboration with informal education sector

Teachers identified a range of collaborations with the informal education sector. These collaborations included collaborations with:

- Local artists across a range of art forms and media
- Cultural institutions
- Local Arts organisations
- Museum curators
- Subject specialists

The teachers also mentioned collaborations with local businesses and community organisations, such as Men's Sheds. They appeared to view collaborations with the informal education sector as a natural extension of inter-school collaboration and many saw these collaborations extending beyond the duration of the initiative, as the following comments show:

> We have made contacts with creative practitioners that will hopefully lead to further engagement going forward.' (QT1)
>
> 'We are more aware of opportunities in the community to bring creativity into the school … and to use those resources close to us.' (QT28)
>
> 'It has urged us to work more with our local community (parents, men's shed, local business etc.)' (QT49)

7.5 Range of activities

Teachers corroborated the range of creative activities described in the Planning Model Documents (see 4). They also described how their plans developed and changed over time and in response to the school closures imposed due to COVID-19. One teacher described how Creative Clusters enabled the range of creative activities for students and their families to be extended during the school closure:

> 'It actually even developed during the school closure. The teacher telephoned the parents of the pupils and a group in each class elected to continue at home. Teacher sent the materials and instructions in the post and was available on the phone re any queries. Some parents sent in some photos of the work and pupils were asked to keep the work safely until September' (QT32)

In their comments, the respondents emphasised that collaboration within, between and beyond schools was a significant enabler in extending the range of creative activities available in schools.

7.6 Embedding the creative process

Most teachers identified the time and space provided by the initiative, for developing professional collaborations within, between and beyond schools as key to embedding the creative process in schools, as the following comments show:

> 'In school team bonding. Children exposed to wonderful habits of mind … Web of support from cluster participants and facilitator invaluable.' (QT16)
>
> 'The opportunity to collaborate with others beyond your own school and the opening up to new ideas … especially with primary schools, this chance to look beyond our own small

> grouping, to reach out into the community and to access the abundance of skill and talent and resources on our doorstep.' (QT28)
>
> 'It's an opportunity to develop a high functioning classroom in an enjoyable and very engaging way and to participate and work collaboratively with other teachers and pupils from other schools as well as engaging with outside influences.' (QT59)

Additionally, many teachers saw these collaborations extending beyond the life of the initiative:

> 'The connection with the other two schools will be sustained' (QT8)
>
> 'Teachers have continued to collaborate for not just classroom activities but also sports … etc.' (QT9)
>
> 'During the project I had the opportunity to visit two other schools involved on several occasions. We discussed our own practice as teachers. One of the teachers involved was an art teacher. She shared with us so many ways of combining art and drama together. We had lengthy chats and learned a lot from one another. We also discussed possible opportunities for collaborating in the future and visiting each other's schools for various projects. So solid' (QT30)

The teachers underlined the importance of principal support in embedding the creative process (see 7.2.2). They also attested to the importance of the finance provided by the initiative for material and human resources. Additionally, some teachers suggested extending the supports for clusters for up to three or four years to ensure 'a greater chance of new practices being embedded in schools' (QT9).

7.7 Approaches to CPD

As is evident from the previous section (7.6), the opportunities enabled by Creative Clusters for professional collaborations to embed creative processes appear to correlate with the opportunities afforded by these collaborations for teacher CPD. These professional collaborations enabled teachers to share resources, upskill (see 7.3), 'and support each other in unforeseen ways' (QT16). The 'sharing of expertise' (QT13), ideas and reflections on practice in the Professional Learning Communities, or PLCs, enabled by Creative Clusters was, moreover, continuous, sustained, and closely connected to the work of teachers in the

classroom, and, thereby, in line with the approach to CPD advocated by Ireland's Teaching Council (see 2.4). Many PLCs also became a vehicle for the shared sourcing and engagement of external CPD providers as well as for the formal sharing of expertise by participating teachers and Facilitators with relevant expertise. Out of 56 teachers, 47 stated that participation in Creative Clusters enabled reflective practice (see Figure 33).

Figure 33: Reflective practice

Has participation in Creative Clusters enabled reflective practice?
56 responses
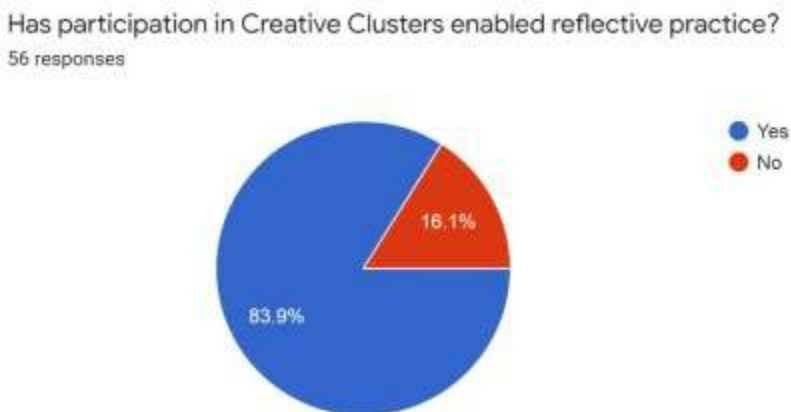
The ways in which reflective practices were enabled are elaborated on in the following comments:

'By meeting regularly with the other schools involved and our facilitator, we were more likely to reflect on our decisions and amend our plans based on discussion with others. We were also more likely to justify our actions and decisions because we were working with others.' (QT19)

'It enables the teachers involved to work more collaboratively, to develop more flexibility, to think more critically about their own practice in terms of creativity and encourages and promotes openness to new experiences.' (QT47)

'As we hit difficulties and stumbling blocks it was fantastic to have the expertise of other staff members on hand to help work through problems and resolve them. It enabled the teacher to look at their own teaching and try techniques that were out of their comfort zones.' (QT55)

Additionally, the skills developed through Creative Clusters offered value in terms of career progression. Nominated school representatives and Creative Cluster Coordinators took on

leadership and management roles, for which they received training. Opportunities were afforded to other teachers to provide CPD for their peers. Participation in the initiative prompted one teacher to play a more active role in developing STEAM with the local Education Support Centre.

7.8 Summary of findings from teacher questionnaire responses

The teachers too saw the Creative Clusters model as a highly effective model in terms of teacher CPD. They reported that the PLCs enabled continuous and sustained teacher-teacher professional learning opportunities focused on developing students' creative skills via student led learning projects. The PLCs also provided a vehicle for the provision of more formal CPD opportunities by external providers as well as by teachers and Facilitators with relevant expertise. The strong desire expressed by many teachers to sustain these PLCs beyond the duration of Creative Clusters attests to the inspiration and empowerment they enabled. Indeed, inter-school, teacher-teacher collaboration was identified by most of the respondents as the principal benefit of Creative Clusters (see 7.2.2). Teachers reported that participation in Creative Clusters facilitated them to develop a wide range of creative pedagogies, to engage in sustained reflective practices, to learn new skills and to engage in collaborative problem solving on an on-going basis. While some teachers found it challenging initially to hand control over to their pupils and to embrace student-led learning, they learnt to support the inclusion of pupil voice more fully as the project progressed. Many teachers observed that participation in Creative Clusters moved them out of their comfort zones, impelled them to take risks and enabled them to become more comfortable with uncertainty. They also observed these same occurrences in their students. In this way, their classrooms functioned as 'natural' extensions, or mirror images, of the larger, teacher-led, inter-school, collaborative processes in which they themselves were participating. They attested too to the resultant empowering impact on their pupils. The teachers also documented the impact on student learning and creativity (and on their own professional development) of extending learning opportunities beyond classrooms and schools into communities and into collaborations with the informal education sector. Some teachers expressed a strong desire to sustain these latter connections beyond the duration of the initiative, indicating the high regard in which they were held. Finance and dedicated out of school time were identified by the respondents as crucial to enabling all these collaborations.

While most teachers attested to the benefit of a highly skilled, Creative Cluster Facilitator in enabling projects to progress, some felt that this role could be filled by a suitably skilled Creative Cluster Coordinator. The respondents also attested to the importance of principal support when it came to enabling and embedding the cluster model in schools. However, just under half of the principal respondents to the survey did not receive any training, nor did one third of the respondents overall. These figures go some way towards explaining the initial confusion among teachers about the initiative. Although most of the teachers who received training were satisfied, some felt that greater clarity on the nature of the initiative and the various roles within it was needed.

8. Findings from a selection of children and young people

As outlined above (see 3.2.1), the perspectives of children and young people were – due to the school closures and restricted access to schools resulting from COVID-19 – the most difficult to capture. The key findings in this section are drawn from age-appropriate learner research-tasks administered, and reported on, by a purposive sample of teachers across seven schools (one special school and six mainstream primary schools). The research tasks were selected by the teachers from a menu provided by the researcher (see Appendix D) and comprised focus group interviews and the compilation of books of meaning. To represent the findings from children and young people as coherently and holistically as possible, these findings are presented as a single data set, under the following themed headings:

- The implications of the cluster model for learning and collaboration
- The inclusion of pupil voice

8.1 Pupil perspectives on the cluster model

8.1.1 Pupil learning

In their reported comments, in their drawings and collages, and in their writing comprised of short captions, poems and prose, the pupils commented both favourably and creatively on their experiences of Creative Clusters. Pupil creativity is evident in a third-class child's introduction to his class's book of meaning:

> [name of school] NS boasts a fantastic menu. Their options range from gormay (*sic*) soup to luxury rockyroads. Executive chef Ms … [teacher name] is better than Gordon Ramsay. Ms … [teacher name] and her team of twenty one chefs will take the world by storm. Look out the Ivy.

Pupil creativity is evident too in the form and content of the following entry to another book of meaning:

> Colourful art
> Radiant colour
> Electric feeling
> Artistic fun
> Tremendous plays
> Imagination runs free
> Various colours
> Excellent fun

The pupils consulted identified a variety of skills (many project or domain specific) developed through their participation in Creative Clusters. Among the project specific skills mentioned were cooking skills, which included: learning new recipes, 'pushing the cutter into the dough', mixing, and chopping. Some pupils mentioned that through cooking and baking, they learnt about the importance of measurement and estimation (maths). They also learnt about the importance of art in decorating cakes. Other skills mentioned by pupils include engineering skills, learning to make and bring puppets to life, learning about climate change, learning to 'do drama' and learning to make art from recycled materials. While this snapshot provides some insight into the range of activities in which pupils participating in Creative Clusters engaged, it should be noted that given the small sample size, the range of activities reported on here is not representative of the range of activities in which children engaged in the initiative overall.

Some pupils recorded that as they engaged in what had previously occurred to them as simple activities, they discovered that some of these activities were indeed quite difficult. But, despite what one child called 'some struggles here and there', they learned to negotiate the difficulties they encountered, to accept mistakes as inevitable and to learn from them. A third-class child wrote:

> I liked this project because sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't work. It is cool seeing how it turns out.'

Pupils also reported being pleasantly surprised by their achievements, and one first/second class child wrote: 'I can't believe we did so good'. As pupils learned through trial and error, they developed their critical appreciation skills. One child commented that: 'Before you might not like it but now you appreciate how hard it was to make'. Pupils' critical appreciation skills were further enhanced by visits to galleries, museums, and theatrical performances, as well as by school visits from artists and subject specialists:

> I loved the art exhibition from loads of different artists. The thing I thought was really cool and hard is the work and effort they put in, but we think that it would be easy. So that tells us it is really hard if you want to be an artist.

A fourth-class child observed that 'something changed because when I go to … [gallery name] now I can talk about the stuff [art] there'. These observations indicate some degree of alignment between the development of pupils' critical appreciation skills and their experience

of an appropriate level of challenge. In one school, where two fifth classes were involved in a project with two different teachers, a few children observed that in one class the pupils were challenged while in the other the basics were 'over emphasised'. One child put this discrepancy down to the possibility that 'maybe not every teacher is as experienced at … [the activity]', underlining the importance of teacher content knowledge/skill when it comes to challenging pupils and maximising opportunities for learning. Another child proposed a creative solution to the issue: 'Each class must share out the jobs better.'

Many pupils cited cooperation and teamwork among the skills they developed through participating in Creative Clusters. One pupil observed how these skills transferred beyond the project and across the curriculum, making 'you better at team-work for science or any other subject'. Many pupils described how the projects inspired them 'to do more [project related] things at home.' Overwhelmingly, students cited fun, excitement, and opportunities to collaborate with classmates and with pupils from other schools as the highlights of their participation in Creative Clusters, as the following selection of comments shows:

'It was so much fun.'

'Exciting times and full of fun.'

'I had fun … with my friends.'

'I enjoyed … with my friends.'

'I also liked having time with my friends doing …'

'I like working with my friends.'

'I learned to make new friends in other schools.'

'I liked creative clusters because we got to mix with different schools.'

'I loved all the different schools and seeing all of the work.'

'So much fun … 3 schools combined … cool!'

'I liked meeting new friends.'

> 'I think the Creative Clusters is a great idea. It's nice to mix with the other schools. I loved watching the play and doing all the beautiful art with the different teachers.'
>
> 'I really enjoyed creative clusters. Very excited to meet other kids.'
>
> 'Sometimes I am not a great drawer and I did not like doing drawing but I liked doing art and talking to my friends … After [working with an artist] I was doing new art. I was learning new things like doing art and painting a jaguar. The art was in … [gallery name] and some people saw my beautiful art.'

It is evident from the above comments too, that pupils welcomed the opportunities afforded by Creative Clusters to extend their horizons for learning within as well as beyond their classrooms and schools. Most of the pupils commented that they would like the opportunity to participate in Creative Clusters again. They also hoped that other classes in their school would have the opportunity to do so.

8.1.2 Pupil voice

The fifth-class pupils cited above (8.1.1), who documented the discrepancy between the activities engaged in by two classes – though both 'did the same amount' – displayed confidence in their opinions and in their right to express them. They also displayed confidence in the forum in which they were invited to express those opinions: in a focus group interview with one of the teachers in their school. In response to the opening question (what worked well?), these pupils fore-fronted pupil voice, attesting both to its inclusion from the outset and to the value they put on it. This is illustrated in the following reported discussion on the setting up of the project:

> Pupil one: Everyone had their say.
>
> Pupil two: … The younger kids were able to understand. Kids were leading an initiative,
>
> Pupil three: Every child got a say. It was fair.
>
> Pupil four: Children got to vote. It was child led, not teacher led.
>
> Pupil one: It was good that children picked. Sometimes teachers pick things that children don't like.

One child, however, felt that as the project progressed 'kids should have had more control of … choices made.' Although this opinion was not echoed by the others, it illustrates the premium put by pupils on their right to contribute meaningfully to their own learning.

Overall, pupils recalled and commented favourably on activities in which they had experienced a high degree of autonomy. And, when questioned about how decisions were made in the project, they acknowledged that they had 'made the decisions' and that 'it was good'.

8.2 Summary of findings from pupil responses

The pupils were overwhelmingly positive about their experience of Creative Clusters. The strong desire expressed by most to participate in the initiative again attests to the fun, inspiration, and empowerment it enabled. For many pupils, in-class collaboration with their friends, inter-school collaboration with pupils from other schools, and collaboration with artists and other subject specialists were the highlights of the initiative.

The findings provide a snapshot of the range of activities in which pupils engaged and reveal some insights into the learning they achieved. The pupils reported that participation in Creative Clusters enabled them to learn new skills and to engage in collaborative learning. They also reported that these new skills extended beyond the subjects being explored in the project and beyond the school. There was evidence of the inclusion of pupil voice, which appeared to be highly valued by pupils. And there was evidence of pupils' confidence in their abilities to lead their own learning. Indeed, the activities on which pupils reported most frequently tended to be those in which they experienced autonomy. Some pupils also identified the need for activities to be appropriately challenging and there was some evidence to suggest that, when combined with exposure to the work of experts, such challenges enabled pupils to develop their critical appreciation skills. There was evidence too, that pupils – like teachers – had moved out of their comfort zones, had engaged in risk-taking and had become comfortable with uncertainty.

9. Conclusion

Creative Clusters has been shown to offer significant benefits to schools, teachers, children, and communities. Commendably, interest in the initiative has grown incrementally since its inception in 2018/19. In 2021, 482 schools applied to participate, with 81 of those being selected to form clusters across each of the 21 full-time Education Support Centres in 2021/22. This makes Creative Clusters the most subscribed in-school initiative within the Creative Youth Programme and attests to the success of the cluster model.

Creative Clusters has excelled as a model of teacher CPD. The initiative is predicated on the formation of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) comprised of clusters of schools focused on a common concern. As a model of teacher CPD, Creative Clusters is aligned with best practice internationally, with the Creative Youth Plan, and with Ireland's Teaching Council's framework for teacher professional learning. The effectiveness of the initiative's PLCs is attested to by the extent to which they enabled teachers to collaboratively articulate shared concerns and goals and to engage in sustained reflective dialogue. Within these PLCs too, teachers co-constructed knowledge, shared expertise, developed creative pedagogies, learned new skills, took risks, and learned to tolerate uncertainty. In this way, Creative Clusters enabled teachers themselves to develop the creative dispositions they were expected to cultivate in their pupils. Teachers' understanding of creativity was, moreover, extended beyond the arts to include all subjects and everyday activities, and beyond creative products to include creative processes as well. In this way, the PLCs functioned as models for the sorts of learning communities that teachers could (and did) replicate in and beyond their classrooms and schools. Schools and classrooms thus became 'natural' extensions of these PLCs. The PLCs functioned most effectively when they were strongly supported by principals and embedded in broader school reform efforts. Additionally, the collaborations enabled by Creative Clusters played a significant role in embedding the creative process in schools. This too was most successful when driven, or at least strongly supported, by school principals.

Creative Clusters excelled in its empowerment of pupils as leaders of, and collaborators in, their own learning. Pupils' ownership of the projects in which they engaged inspired and motivated them to move out of their comfort zones, to take risks, and to learn to live with ambiguity. It also enabled them to develop listening and teamwork skills, to gain subject specific knowledge and skills, and to develop their critical appreciation skills. As they grew in

confidence, pupils learned, moreover, to embrace their mistakes as opportunities for learning. Furthermore, as advocated in the Creative Youth Plan, pupils' conception of learning was extended beyond their schools to include collaborations with other schools as well as with the informal education sector.

Aligning with the Creative Youth Plan, Creative Clusters extended the range of activities in which pupils engaged to include a broad spectrum of activities across a wide range of subjects. Many of these activities also extended across a range of curriculum areas. Collaborations within schools, between schools, and with the informal education sector played a significant part in enabling this to happen.

As a national initiative comprised of local projects, Creative Clusters holds enormous potential for embedding creativity in Ireland's schools. The ESCI network – consisting of a national network of local Education Support Centres closely connected with teachers and schools – is ideally positioned to lead it. Creative Clusters affords both teachers and pupils a high degree of autonomy, the results of which are evident throughout the findings. In this way, the initiative provides a welcome antidote, for teachers and pupils alike, to the imperatives exerted by national and international assessment and accountability procedures. The supports provided by the initiative in terms of training, and time and space for cluster meetings (with full substitute cover), are crucial to fostering such high levels of autonomy and, concomitantly, to embedding the creative process in Ireland's schools. These supports are essential too, for establishing and maintaining the requisite teacher-teacher relationships on which successful learning communities are predicated and collaborative projects are formulated (and reformulated). The financial grant provided by the initiative also ensured that these projects could be adequately resourced. Additionally, the designated leadership roles of Creative Cluster Facilitator, Creative Cluster Coordinator and nominated school representative enabled the leadership necessary to ensure the timely and successful completion of local projects and to facilitate professional learning communities within and between schools to flourish.

9.1 Enablers

This section outlines the enablers towards the successful development of Creative Clusters into the future. It is based on the research findings presented in this report and informed by relevant literature (see 1 and 2).

9.1.1 Creative Clusters as a national programme of local projects

As a national programme, Creative Clusters benefitted from Government investment. As a national programme of local projects, it was embedded in, and led by, ESCI, a national network of local Education Support Centres. This existing network, with substantial experience in the local administration of national projects, was ideally positioned to provide the leadership and administrative support necessary to ensure the smooth running of Creative Clusters. At national level, the initiative was administered by the National Arts in Education Administrative Office at the Education Centre, Tralee. As with any new initiative, there were administrative teething problems, many of which have been addressed. Indeed, the ongoing responsiveness of the National Arts in Education Administrative Office to administrative issues as they arose is commendable. At local level, the role played by Education Support Centre Directors with strong local knowledge was crucial in the nomination of suitably skill Creative Cluster Facilitators and in ensuring the smooth running of local projects. As a national programme of local projects, embedded in a national network with local roots, Creative Clusters was afforded high status. The supports (time and resources) provided for at national level exemplified the value put on the initiative and incentivised and motivated teachers and schools on the ground. The involvement in the initiative of the informal education sector, artists and other subject specialists also generated further interest.

9.1.2 Training days

The Facilitator training days provided time and space for Facilitators to get to know each other and to achieve clarity on the nature of the initiative. They also provided a forum in which they could clarify their role and responsibilities, and those of Coordinators, nominated school representatives, and schools. For teachers too, the Regional Cluster Training Days provided time and space for them to get to know each other and the Facilitator with whom they would be working. Additionally, these days provided a forum in which the nature of the initiative, and the various roles and responsibilities within school clusters could be clarified. The opportunities afforded to engage in collaborative activities/dialogue centred on creativity and

the inclusion of pupil voice provided further clarification, while simultaneously contributing to the building of relationships. Additionally, these training days provided time, space, and support for teachers to work, within their clusters, on developing local projects.

9.1.3 The formation of Professional Learning Communities

The effectiveness of Creative Clusters as a model of teacher CPD has been reiterated throughout this report and is centred on the formation within the initiative of Professional Learning Communities or PLCs. The supports provided by the initiative in terms of training, and time and space for cluster meetings (with full substitute cover) were crucial in establishing and maintaining these PLCs. The provision of skilled Creative Cluster Facilitators, with designated responsibilities for leading meetings ensured that the PLCs functioned effectively, as did the nomination of Creative Cluster Coordinators and nominated school representatives. The PLCs enabled teachers to share expertise and to engage in critically reflective dialogue around common projects. Many PLCs became vehicles for members to share expertise more formally and many also sourced and engaged external CPD providers as the need arose. The financial support (in the form of a grant for material and human resources) provided by Creative Clusters was a key enabler in this regard. Financial support also ensured, more generally, that the projects in schools were adequately resourced.

9.1.4 Collaborative learning

A collaborative approach to teacher learning permeates the PLCs enabled by Creative Clusters. The iterative development of local projects was deeply rooted in a sense of mutual ownership and collaboration, as teachers engaged in, and co-reflected on, their shared projects. As teachers took control of their learning, they became increasingly inspired, motivated, and empowered by their collaborations with each other, artists, subject specialists, and the informal education sector. Their first-hand experience of the benefits of collaborative learning meant that they were ideally positioned to support and cultivate it in their classrooms. Indeed, collaborative learning was identified by teachers and students alike as the highlight of Creative Clusters and played a key role in the success of the initiative.

9.1.5 Opportunities to take risks and 'think outside the box'

As collaborative co-learners within PLCs teachers were enabled to move out of their comfort zones, to take risks, and to learn to live with uncertainty. As they developed these dispositions, teachers also fostered them in their pupils. The cultivation of risk-taking – one

of the dispositions for creativity posited in the Five Creative Dispositions Model – is key to embedding the creative process in schools. Furthermore, Hargreaves (2015) and others (see 2.4) emphasise the importance of risk-taking for sustaining changes in teaching.

9.1.6 The centrality of teacher and pupil voice

Creative Clusters enabled teachers to engage in collaborative and creative processes and projects in which their voice was central. The initiative thus provided a welcome and empowering counterpoint to the top-down imperatives exerted by national and international assessment and accountability procedures. As teachers took ownership of their own learning, they encouraged their pupils to do likewise, integrating pupil voice into, and making it central to, the development of local projects.

9.1.7 Committed school leadership

Committed school leadership was considered by Education Support Centre Directors, Creative Cluster Facilitators, and teachers as vital to the success of Creative Clusters and crucial for embedding creative processes in schools. Indeed, the success of the initiative depended not just on the commitment of principals but on the strong commitment of all participating teachers.

9.2 Constraints

This section outlines the constraints that need to be addressed to ensure the successful development of Creative Clusters into the future. It is based on the research findings presented in this report and informed by relevant literature (see 1 and 2). By far the largest constraint on the Implementer and Adapter clusters on which this research and evaluation report focuses was the interruption to projects due to the school closures resulting from COVID-19. These closures, and the subsequent restrictions imposed on schools, made it difficult to maintain motivation and momentum, reduced the time that could be spent on local projects, meant that some projects had to be reformulated, and made others impossible to complete. Cluster meetings also moved to on-line platforms, such as ZOOM. These closures and restrictions impacted, moreover, on the research and evaluation process. Notably, it meant that four planned case-studies could not be undertaken (see 3).

9.2.1 Education Support Centre Director turnover

The high turnover of Education Support Centre Directors meant that many Directors did not have the requisite local knowledge and experience to nominate suitably skilled Facilitators or to oversee the smooth running of the initiative at local level. It also meant that the robust Director-Director systems required for Directors to support each other to manage national initiatives at local level were not in place. High Director turnover has implications too for achieving the aims of the initiative as they relate to the ongoing maintenance of collaborations with the arts and cultural sectors (see 2.5).

9.2.2 Training

Training needed to ensure greater clarity on the nature of the initiative and on the roles and responsibilities of the Creative Cluster Facilitator, the Creative Cluster Coordinator and nominated school representatives. The need for all principals, as key enablers of the initiative, to receive training was also apparent.

9.2.3 Prioritisation of practice

Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018) maintain that sustainable changes in teaching are dependent on the grounding of teacher-teacher collaboration and dialogue in both theory and practice. The findings in this report indicate that Creative Clusters has prioritised practice over the integration of theory and practice. Conceptions of what constitutes creativity – though broadly based on the Five Creative Dispositions Model – were insufficiently interrogated. Issues around creativity as domain specific and/or domain generic were largely ignored and there was no attempt to connect practice with the OECD-CERI rubrics for creativity and creative thinking developed by Vincent-Lancrin *et a*l. (2019). Issues around teaching creatively and/or teaching for creativity were also insufficiently interrogated, as was the notion of pupil voice of pupil voice.

9.2.4 Lack of available substitution cover for teachers

The lack of available substitute cover for teachers to attend Regional Cluster Training Days and cluster meetings was reiterated by both Facilitators and teachers and is likely to account for the non-attendance by some teachers, especially teaching principals, at Training Days. This added to the initial confusion about the nature of the initiative and the roles and responsibilities of the various parties involved.

9.2.5 Lack of available data on the inclusion of pupil voice

Teachers, pupils, and Facilitators attested to the inclusion of pupil voice and to some of the ways in which it was included. But, in the absence of case studies, it was not possible to provide a more comprehensive account of learner engagement in the design, development, and evaluation of the outcome-based projects at the heart of Creative Clusters.

10. Recommendations

Recommendations towards the future development of Creative Clusters centre on three key areas. These key areas are grounded in the findings, enablers and constraints presented in this research and evaluation report and are identified under the following headings:

- The cluster model
- Training and professional development
- Research and evaluation

The Cluster model

- The DoE needs to continue to prioritise and provide funding for Creative Clusters.
- The DoE needs to support the maintenance of existing clusters – as well as to develop new ones – to sustain changes in teaching practice and embed creative processes in schools.
- The DoE needs to ensure that an adequate supply of substitute teachers is available at local level.
- The ESCI network is best placed to facilitate Creative Clusters regionally and locally. The issues of Director turnover needs to be addressed for this, and all other recommendations concerning the network, to be effectively achieved.
- The ESCI network has a key role to play in advocating for the initiative and in securing the support of school leadership nationally, regionally, and locally.
- At local level, the Education Support Centre Director has a key role to play in selecting schools/clusters of schools, in nominating suitably skilled Creative Cluster Facilitators and in facilitating and overseeing collaborations with the informal education, arts and cultural sectors. The Director should, in certain circumstances, be enabled to nominate full-time teachers as Facilitators.
- The Creative Cluster Facilitator should ***in exceptional circumstances,*** in consultation with the Education Centre Director and participating teachers, have discretion for flexibility in organising cluster meetings.
- At local level, the Education Support Centre Director should have a designated role in mediating cluster-level communication and other issues.

Training and professional development

- Regional Cluster Training Days for all participants should take place early in the academic year, with bespoke training being provided for school principals.

- Regional Cluster Training Days should ensure clarity for all participants on the nature of the initiative and the various roles and responsibilities inherent in it.

- Attendance at Training Days by school principals and at least one other teacher in participating schools should be a requirement for participation in the initiative.

- There is a need to consult with Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) to address the current deficit in theory and to investigate ways of embedding theory in ongoing teacher-teacher dialogue.

- Strong links with the non-formal education sector will enable opportunities for teacher professional development.

Research and evaluation

- Continuing research is required to inform future directions of the initiative.

- There is a need to conduct cluster case studies, over an extended period, to achieve in-depth insights into the development of clusters over time. Cluster case studies would also provide greater insight into the ways in which pupil voice is included over the life of a project, from the design stage through to the evaluation stage.

11. Cost-benefit analysis

This section sets out the relevant projected costs and benefits of Creative Clusters into the future. The financial costs are based on the costs attached to the initiative over the academic years 2018/19 and 2019/20, and into the first term of the academic year 2020/21. (It was planned to run the pilot phase over two academic years but, due to the school closures resulting from COVID-19, the pilot was extended into the first term of a third academic year on a once-off basis.) All projected costs are based on information provided by the National Arts in Education Administration Office, at the Education Centre, Tralee, and the National Director for the Integration of the Arts in Education (Department of Education).

11.1 Defining costs

Since there were no capital costs associated with the Creative Clusters initiative the costs outlined in this cost-benefit analysis are based only on the direct running costs incurred throughout the project appraisal period, which spans just over two academic years (rather than over two financial years). Only the net additional or marginal quantitative costs over and above those normally associated with the running of schools and Education Support Centres are included in the analysis. Operational costs that pre-date and exist separately from the initiative, are not considered. All costs are expressed in current value terms.

11.2 Defining benefits

The economic benefits to accrue from Creative Clusters are likely to be long-term and are, therefore difficult to quantify. The potential quantitative benefits discussed below (11.4) centre on value for money as well as on the potential benefits of the initiative they relate to Ireland's future economic development and individual employability. Since the qualitative benefits to accrue from Creative Clusters are more readily identifiable, they are the main focus of this analysis. The principal benefits of the initiative identified in section 9 are revisited and expanded on below (see 11.5), under the following headings:

- Public policy (11.5.1)
- National wellbeing and investment in young people's creativity (11.5.2)
- Status, and public profile of creativity in schools (11.5.3)
- Teacher agency (11.5.4)

- Wellbeing and teacher and pupil agency (11.5.5)

11.3 Quantitative costs

The projected costs per annum, expressed in current value terms, are set out in the tables below. These costs are predicated on costs incurred over the two-year pilot phase of the initiative and are based on information provided by the National Arts in Education Administrative Office at the Education Centre, Tralee, and the National Director for the Integration of the Arts in Education (Department of Education).

11.3.1 Financial grant to clusters

Table 1: Projected per annum financial grant to clusters - € *Expressed in current value terms*	
School grant (42 clusters, 2 attached to each full-time Education Support Centre, one in Year 1 and the other in Year 2, with an average of 3.6 schools per cluster) 151 schools@€1,500 per school	226,500
Projected grant	**226,500**
Note: 3.6 schools per cluster is calculated on the average number of schools in each cluster over 2018/19 and 2019/20.	

11.3.2 Training

Table 2: Projected per annum cost of training - € *Expressed in current value terms*	
Creative Cluster Facilitator Training and Regional Cluster Training	11,271.50
Projected training cost	**11,271.50**
Note: This cost is calculated on the average amount paid to CCE for training in 2018/19 and 2019/20 and is paid directly to CCE by the Department of Education.	

11.3.3 Creative Cluster Facilitator

Table: 3 Projected per annum cost of Creative Cluster Facilitators - € *Expressed in current value terms*	
21 Year 1 Facilitators @ €1500 based on an allocation of one Facilitator per cluster	31,500
21 Year 2 Facilitators @ €900 based on an allocation of one Facilitator per cluster	18,900
Projected Facilitator cost	**50,400**
Note: In Year 1, Creative Cluster Facilitators attend CCF training, a Regional Cluster Training Day and 3 subsequent meetings for which each is paid €300X5=€1,500. In year 2, Facilitators attend	

CCF training and facilitate 2 meetings per cluster for which each is paid €300X3=€900. The cost here is based on the allocation of 21 Facilitators in Year 1 and 21 Facilitators in Year 2. When Facilitators facilitate more than one cluster, they receive payment for only one CCF training day and one Regional Cluster Training Day, which would result in some slight adjustments to the above.

11.3.4 Operational costs

Table 4: Projected per annum operational costs - €	
Expressed in current value terms	
Administration (national)	30,000
Administration (local) @€500X21 Education Support Centres	10,500
Materials (local) @€200X21 Education Support Centres	4,200
Room-hire for training events and meetings Varies from €75-€150, depending on location and calculated here at a rate mid-way between both figures @€112.50 1 Creative Cluster Facilitator training day @€112.50 6 Regional Cluster Training Days @€112.50 63 Year 1 cluster meetings @€112.50 42 Year 2 cluster meetings @€112.50 Total@€112.50X112	 112.50 675.00 7,087.50 4,725.00 12,600
Catering @ €15.41pp for training events and meetings 7 training events with 16 participants (average across the 7 events) = 7X16X€15.41 105 cluster meetings with 3.6 participants (average number of schools/teacher representatives per cluster over 2018/19 and 2019/20) = 105X3.6X€15.41 Total @€15.41X490	 1,725.92 5,824.98 7,550.90

Travel @ 16.92 cent per km for training events and meetings
Region 1 Cluster Training Day (Dublin, DCU)
     3.6 (average number of school reps per cluster) X362 (km) X16.92
 	
Region 2 Cluster Training Day (Kildare Education Support Centre)
     (3.6X10) + (3.6X224X16.92)
 	
Region 3 Cluster Training Day (Kilkenny Education Centre)
     (3.6X10) + (3.6X222x16.92)
 	
Region 4 Cluster Training Day (Cork Education Support Centre)
     (3.6X10) + (3.6X534X16.92)
 	
Region 5 Cluster Training Day (Laois Education Centre)
	
	220.50
	
	172.44
	
	171.22
	
	361.27

(3.6X10) + (3.6X786X16.92)	514.76
Region 6 Cluster Training Day (Sligo Education Centre)	
(3.6X10) + (3.6X422X16.92)	257.05
105 cluster meetings attended by an average of 3.6 teachers @ €10 euro per teacher = 105X3.6.10	3,780.00
Total for travel	5,477.24
Projected operational costs	**70.328.14**

Note: Travel expenses for teachers attending a local Centre for meetings or training are estimated at an approximate rate of €10 per person. In line with Teacher Education Section (TES) of the Department of Education travel and training rate guidelines, travel is paid at the cost of bus or train fares or 16.92 cent per km, where less expensive public transport is not available. Motor travel rates are not paid in respect of claimants who have to travel less than 10 miles (single journey) to the course. Private cars should only be used when there is no suitable public transport available or where public transport is available at equal or greater expense.

11.3.5 Substitution cover

Table 5: Projected per annum substitution cover - €	
Expressed in current value terms	
Cluster meeting cover: 105X3.6@€210 (average cost per day)	79,380
Cover for 2 planning days for each Creative Cluster Coordinator in Year 1 = 2X2X210	8,820
Cover for 2 planning days for each Creative Cluster Coordinator in Year 2 = 2X21X210	8,820
Projected substitution costs	**88,200**

11.3.6 Projected per annum total costs

All of the costs outlined above (from 11.3.1 through to 11.3.6) are summarised in the following table:

Table 7: Projected per annum total costs - €	
Expressed in current value terms (rounded to nearest euro)	
Financial grant to clusters	226,500
Creative Cluster Facilitator training and Regional Cluster Training Days	11,272
Creative Cluster Facilitator costs	50,400
Operating costs	70,328
Teacher substitution cover	88,200
Total	**455,520**

11.4 Quantitative benefits

At a cost of under half a million per year, Creative Clusters, represents considerable value for money, given its reach and impact. Data provided by the Arts in Education Administrative

Office at the Education Centre Tralee, reveals that 253 teachers participated directly in the project in the 2019/20 school year. However, most of the teachers who responded to the questionnaire reported the involvement of multiple classes in their schools while others (most notably in smaller schools) reported the involvement of the whole school. This means that many more than 253 teachers were involved in the initiative in 2019/20. Taking 253 and multiplying it by 23.3 (the latest figures on class size in primary schools, published by the DoE in August 2021), evidences the involvement of at least 5,895 children and young people in Creative Clusters in 2019/20, at a cost of €77.27 per child. This makes investment in Creative Clusters by the School Excellence Fund very good value indeed.

The economic benefits of investing in creativity itself are, however, likely to be long-term rather than short-term, making them difficult to quantify. Nevertheless, the potential benefits of investing in creativity, in terms of a nation's economic development and the employability of its citizens are well documented (see 1.9). Citing studies from around the world, Vincent-Lancrin *et al* (2019) conclude that:

> All in all, there seems to be a consensus that creativity and critical thinking [integral to the Five Creative Dispositions Model and other models of creativity discussed in this report] will become more important in people's professional life, and in much higher demand in the labour market in the decades to come (p.19).

The OECD (2019) also emphasises the importance of creativity as a key competence for economic success and as fundamental to addressing the demands of economies for flexible workers who can 'undertake work that cannot easily be replicated by machines and address increasingly complex local and global challenges with out-of-the-box solutions' (p.6). Creative Clusters harnesses the most significant, costly, and broad-reaching resource in education (teachers) to maximise the returns to the economy (and to society) of investment in creativity into the future.

11.5 Qualitative benefits

The qualitative benefits arising from investment in Creative Clusters, both short-term and long-term, are set out below.

11.5.1 Public policy

As outlined in 2.1, the Creative Ireland Programme puts creativity not just at the centre of educational policy but at the 'centre of public policy'. This Programme is predicated on the vision 'that every person in Ireland should have the opportunity to realise their full creative potential' and is nested within broader EU and OECD policy contexts (see 2.1). The inclusion in Creative Clusters of the informal education sector, the arts and cultural sectors, artists and broader creative subject specialists serves to reinforce the importance of creativity in schools and in the wider community. The sorts of inter-agency collaborations thus formed are vital towards embedding creativity in schools, in communities and in the broader public domain. The key position of schools in the public domain means that they occupy a critical space when it comes to the implementation of public policy. Accordingly, professional development for teachers needs to address identified national and international priorities and Creative Clusters excels in this regard.

11.5.2 National wellbeing and investment in young people's creativity

Vincent-Lancrin *et al.* (2019), OECD (2019) and the European Commission (2009) maintain that the benefits of investment in creativity are important for personal wellbeing as well as for economic development. The OECD (2019) contends that creativity enables people to adapt to a rapidly changing world and helps 'young people to discover, develop and define their talents – including their creative talents … making children feel that they are part of the society they live in, and that they have the creative resources to contribute to its development' (p.6). Vincent-Lancrin *et al.* (2019), OECD (2019) and the European Commission (2009) also point to critical/creative thinking as key to the effective functioning of twenty-first century democracies.

11.5.3 Status, and public profile of creativity in schools

As iterated in 10.1.1, the constitution of Creative Clusters as a national programme of local projects, embedded in a national network with local roots, affords the initiative, and creativity itself, high status. The premium put on creativity is underlined by the suite of financial and other supports provided for Creative Clusters at national level. These also serve to incentivise and motivate local teachers and schools. The involvement in the initiative of the informal education sector, the arts and cultural sectors, artists and broader creative subject specialists

also contribute to the initiative's high status, further raises its profile within and beyond schools.

11.5.4 Teacher agency

In Creative Clusters, teachers are positioned as agents with the requisite knowledge, skills, and expertise to implement public policy on creativity and embed it in schools. Indeed, the centrality of teacher voice and agency is vital to the success of the initiative and provides a welcome antidote to teachers from the pressures exerted by demands for increased accountability. In Creative Clusters teachers identify the issues or challenges they wish to address at local level. They lead the development of the innovative arts and creative learning projects that ensue. And they collaborate locally on the design, implementation, evaluation, and dissemination of those projects. As a model of teacher CPD, Creative Clusters places a premium on teachers own creative skills as well as on their skills to teach for creativity. Creative Clusters thus acknowledges the link between teacher quality and student achievement in creativity and the arts. Indeed, teacher quality has been found to be the single most important variable in fostering student achievement across all subjects (Smyth, 1999; Bamford, 2012). Moreover, the replicability in classrooms and schools of the teacher-teacher and school-school collaborative communities at the heart of the initiative offers enormous potential for embedding creativity in schools.

11.5.5 Wellbeing and teacher and pupil agency

One of the primary qualitative benefits of Creative Clusters lies in its potential to motivate and empower teachers and pupils to take risks and be creative in a context in which both teacher voice and student voice are central. The initiative thus fosters a democratic approach to teaching and learning as it contributes to the personal wellbeing of teachers and pupils alike (Vincent-Lancrin *et al*., 2019). The OECD (2019) claims that engaging young people's creative energies in contexts in which their creative potential is recognised, can lead to increased levels of interest, motivation, and empowerment and may be of particular benefit to 'those students who show little interest in school and guide them … to express their ideas and achieve their potential' (p.6). The findings presented in this report indicate that teachers can be similarly motivated and empowered. And, at a time when teachers and pupils are being subjected to increasing demands for accountability, the potential benefits of teacher and pupil wellbeing and empowerment cannot be over-estimated. Indeed, The *Wellbeing and*

Policy Framework for Practice 2018-2023 published by Ireland's Department of Education and Skills (DES, 2019) points to the reciprocal nature of teacher and pupil wellbeing, while also acknowledging the 'reciprocal relationship between wellbeing and the accomplishments of children and young people' (p.12) The types of collaborative relationships at the heart of Creative Clusters, and so highly prized by teachers and pupils alike, are identified in the *Framework* as key to wellbeing. In Creative Clusters these sorts of collaborative relationships extend outwards beyond classrooms and schools into communities and into relationships with other schools. Further, both the both the primary-primary school collaborations and the primary-secondary school collaborations enabled by Creative Clusters can be a source of immense support to young people as they transfer from primary to secondary school.

12. Researcher biography

Dr Dorothy Morrissey is lecturer in drama education at Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick. Dorothy, who holds an EdD from the University of Bristol, has published nationally and internationally on the arts, arts education, and teacher education. A former primary teacher, Dorothy has worked as a trainer and curriculum support person with the Primary Curriculum Support Programme (PCSP) and as regional co-ordinator of the National Pilot Project on Teacher Induction (NPPTI). She has also designed and delivered many training of trainer and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) courses for primary, secondary and third-level teachers. Email: dorothy.morrissey@mic.ul.ie

13. References

Baer, J. (2015). The importance of domain-specific expertise in creativity. *Roeper Review 37*(5), 165-178.

Baer, J. (2011). Domains of creativity. In Runco, M. and Pritzker, S. (Eds), *Encyclopedia of Creativity* (2nd ed). Elsevier Inc. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-375038-9.00079-0

Bamford, A. (2012). *Arts and cultural education in Norway.* Bodo: The Norwegian Centre for Arts and Cultural Education (KKS).

Bowen, D. H. and Kisida, B. (2019). Arts education partnerships: Sources of harmony and dissonance with cultural institutions' collaborative efforts. *Cultural Trends, 28*(5), 379-390. https://doi.org/10.1080/09548963.2019.1679995

Cremin, T. (2017). Introduction – Creativity and creative pedagogies: Exploring challenges, possibilities and potential. In Cremin, T. (Ed) *Creativity and Creative Pedagogies in the Early and Primary Years.* Oxon, UK: Routledge, xviii-xli.

Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2003). Key issues in creativity and development. In Sawyer, R.K., John-Steiner, V., Moran, S. Sternberg, R.J., Feldman, D.H., Nakamura, J. and Csikszentmihalyi, M. (Eds) *Creativity and Development*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 217-242.

Dawson, K., Cawthon, S. W. and Baker, S. (2011) Drama for Schools: Teacher change in an applied theatre professional development model. *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance, 16*(3), 313-335.

Department of Education and Skills (2019). *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018-2023.* Dublin: Department of Education and Skills.

Department of Education and Skills (2015). *Framework for Junior Cycle 2015.* Dublin: Department of Education and Skills.

European Commission (2009) *Panorama 29.* European Commission. https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/panorama/pdf/mag29/mag29_en.pdf

Hargreaves, A. (2015) Push, pull and nudge: The future of teaching and educational change. *LEARNing Landscapes Journal, 9*(1), 119-142.

Hargreaves, A. and O'Connor, M.T. (2018). *Collaborative professionalism: When teaching together means learning for all.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Hollands-Ish, M. (2016) Creativity and imagination in schools: A reflection on practice. *LEARNing Landscapes Journal, 9*(2), 301-315.

Kaufman, J. C., & Baer, J. (2005). The amusement park theory of creativity. In J. C. Kaufman and J. Baer (Eds.), *Creativity across domains: Faces of the muse*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, 321-328.

Lucas, B., Claxton, G. and Spencer, E. (2012). Progression in Creativity: Developing new forms of assessment. Background Paper for the OECD conference 'Educating for Innovative Societies'. Centre for Real-World Learning at the University of Winchester and Creativity, Culture and Education (CCE). http://www.oecd.org/education/ceri/50153675.pdf

Marquis, E. and Vajoczki, S. (2012). Creative differences: Teaching creativity across the disciplines. *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning* 6(1), Article 6.

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) (2020). *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework.* Dublin: NCCA

OECD (2019). *Framework for the assessment of creative thinking in PISA: Third draft. https://www.oecd.org/pisa/publications/PISA-2021-creative-thinking-framework.pdf*

Smyth, E. (1999). *Do schools differ?* Dublin: Oak Tree Press.

Vincent-Lancrin, S. et al. (2019). *Fostering students' creativity and critical thinking: What it means in schools.* Educational Research and Innovation, OECD Publishing, Paris. https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/fostering-students-creativity-and-critical-thinking_62212c37-en

Wenger, E., McDermott, R.A. and Snyder, W. (2002). *Cultivating communities of practice: A guide to managing knowledge*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.

14. Appendices

**Schools Excellence Fund – Creative Clusters
Guidelines 2018**
The purpose and aims of Creative Clusters
The purpose of this pilot scheme is to demonstrate how the arts and creativity can support clusters of schools to work together to address common learning challenges. It aims to:
- Promote new ways of working and collaboration between schools and the arts and cultural sector
- Improve teaching and learning
- Provide an opportunity for clusters of schools to experiment, innovate and collaborate on the design, implementation and evaluation of a bespoke arts and creative learning project
- Develop the creativity of learners and teachers
- Understand, whether clustering schools at different stages of their journey in using the arts and creativity in the classroom and in developing longer term partnerships is an effective model for developing and embedding practice in schools.

Background

Creative Clusters is a pilot initiative of the Department of Education and Skills, led by and in partnership with the 21 full-time Teacher Education Centres (ATECI) and funded through the Schools Excellence Fund – Creative Clusters Initiative. Creative Clusters is an important initiative of Creative Youth – A Plan to Enable the Creative Potential of Every Child and Young Person, which was published in December 2017 as part of the Creative Ireland Programme. The Creative Youth Plan aims to give every child practical access to tuition, experience and participation in art, music, drama and coding by 2022.

What is a Creative Cluster and how many schools are involved?

A Creative Cluster will typically consist of between three and five schools collaborating on the design, implementation, evaluation and dissemination of an innovative arts and creative learning project which supports them to address a common issue or challenge. Creative Clusters will include schools at different stages of their journey in using the arts and creativity in the classroom.

Ideally clusters can consist of primary schools only, post-primary schools only or a combination of primary and post primary schools. In selecting the clusters to participate in the scheme, the initiative will seek to have all three configurations represented in the national pilot. Individual schools who apply and are successful will be placed in a cluster.

Schools can also apply as a cluster with other schools. Clusters can be drawn from existing networks or result from the creation of new ones.

Each cluster must nominate a lead school. The lead school must identify a Creative Cluster Coordinator who would normally be a member of the school's senior leadership team. Substitution costs to the equivalent of 1 day per term for the duration of the pilot project will be provided for the Creative Cluster Coordinator. If the application is successful the co-ordinator will be responsible for managing the day-to-day operation of the project and will act as a single point of contact during the duration of the project. The other schools in each cluster must nominate a representative to participate in the project.

How many Creative Clusters will be in the pilot?

In the pilot year it is envisaged that there will be 21 Creative Clusters in total across Ireland, one in each of the 21 full-time Education Centre areas.

How long will the Creative Clusters scheme run for?

The scheme will initially be introduced on a pilot basis. The pilot, including the application stage, will take place from April 2018 up to the end of the 2018-2019 school year. Subject to funding approval, resource availability and review, this scheme may operate beyond the life of this pilot.

What is the application process?

Creative Clusters is a national programme of local projects and the 21 full-time Education Centres across Ireland are lead partners in the initiative. They will have a key role in identifying and supporting a Creative Cluster for their local area. Individual schools, existing networks of schools and potential clusters of schools must apply to their local full-time Education Centre outlining their rationale for taking part in Creative Clusters initiative by 11th May 2018. The List of full-time Education Centres and associated contact details are attached …

Following the application process the local Education Centre will assess and score applications against the criteria below:
- **The rationale for the application**
  This includes the extent to which the school or schools involved have identified a clear rationale for applying to be a Creative Cluster, how this fits with the aims of the initiative and their initial ideas of common issues or learning challenges they could address
- **Benefits to teaching and learning**
  This includes how participation will support improvements in teaching and learning, in the development of the arts and creativity and in areas of the curriculum
- **Capacity and commitment of all the schools in the cluster to participate**
  This includes the extent to which the senior leaders in the school or schools are committed to the cluster and to mobilising their school community to engage and how schools in the cluster, who are at different stages of their journey in using the arts and creativity in the classroom, see themselves supporting each other

The local Education Centre will then inform the identified cluster in their area. Unsuccessful applicants will also be notified. The completed application must be submitted to [The List of full-time Education Centres and associated contact details are attached …]. The application deadline is 11th May 2018.

Which schools are not eligible to apply to lead or participate in a Creative Cluster?

Schools not in receipt of capitation grants from the Department of Education and Skills/Education and Training Boards and are not in the free-education scheme are not eligible to apply to lead or participate in a Creative Cluster.

Schools selected to participate in the Creative Schools initiative[1] will not be eligible to also participate in the Creative Cluster initiative. The Creative Schools initiative is a pilot initiative led by the Arts Council that supports individual schools to develop and begin to implement their own Creative Schools plan.

Schools selected to participate in other Schools Excellence Fund initiatives (DEIS, Digital or STEM) will not be eligible to participate in the Creative Cluster initiative.

What support is provided to the Creative Clusters?

Selected clusters can expect support to include the following:
- An initial one day training event for Creative Cluster Coordinators and at least one representative from each of the schools in the cluster. This will provide an opportunity for schools in the individual Creative Clusters to work together to develop and progress the focus for their cluster work
- A specially trained Creative Cluster Facilitator who will support the cluster for up to three local creative cluster meetings over the 2018–2019 school year. The Creative Cluster Facilitator will work with the Cluster to develop, implement and evaluate an arts and creative learning project which helps participating schools to address a common school issue or development need. The Cluster will have flexibility in how they wish to schedule these meeting times and days, in consultation with their local Education Centre.
- Networking opportunities with other schools including other Creative Clusters and schools participating in other Creative Youth initiatives to share learning.

What funding is available to each Creative Cluster?

Funding has been set aside for the following:
- Each Creative Cluster will receive funding of €2,500 for one year to implement their project in the 2018–2019 school year. It is anticipated that all schools in the cluster will have a say in how the budget is allocated and spent to support the implement of the project
- Paid substitution will be provided for the Regional Cluster Training event and two/three local cluster meetings.

Do clusters have to have a project idea?

This is not a requirement. Those clusters that are selected to take part will begin their journey as a Creative Cluster by participating in a Regional Cluster Training day. On this day the schools in each cluster will spend time working together to identify a focus for their project work as a Creative Cluster.

Assessment and Selection

Creative Cluster applications will be assessed by the Local Education Centre. Applications will be assessed and scored against the criteria below.

- **The rationale for the application**
  This includes the extent to which the school(s) involved have identified a clear rationale for applying to be a Creative Cluster and their initial ideas of common issues or learning challenges they could address
- **Benefits to teaching and learning**
  This includes how participation will support improvements in teaching and learning, in the development of the arts and creativity and in areas of the curriculum
- **Capacity and commitment of all the schools in the cluster to participate**
  This includes the extent to which the senior leaders in each of the schools are committed to the cluster and to mobilising their school community to engage and how schools in the cluster, who are at different stages of their journey in using the arts and creativity in the classroom, see themselves supporting each other
- **Children and Young Peoples Voice**
  This includes the extent to which the application demonstrates a clear plan for ensuring children and young people play a central role in developing, implementing and evaluating their Creative Cluster project.

Creative Clusters Timeline

Creative Clusters Launched 3 April 2018
Closing date for applications 11 May 2018
Announcement of Creative Clusters 25 May 2018
Regional Training for Creative Cluster Late September
Detailed project planning and implementation work begins October
Initiative completion and review May 2019

2019 intake – Creative Clusters (1 X each Education Centre)
Schools Excellence Fund - Creative Clusters Initiative

What is a Creative Cluster?

For 2019/20 School Year a Creative Cluster can comprise between 3 to 5 schools collaborating on the design, implementation, evaluation and dissemination of an innovative arts and creative learning project which supports them to address a common issue or challenge. Creative Clusters will include schools at different stages of their journey in using the arts and creativity in the classroom. Ideally clusters can consist of primary schools only, post-primary schools only or a combination of primary and post primary schools.

The lead school has nominated a **lead school coordinator** who will work on the Cluster project on behalf of the school, be the point of contact for the school, and be available to attend the Regional Creative Cluster Workshop plus 3 meetings in the local Education Centre.

The remaining schools in the Cluster have nominated one representative hereafter known as the **nominated school representative**.

What is a Lead School? Lead School Coordinator?

Each Cluster must nominate a lead school. The lead school must identify a **Creative Cluster Coordinator** who would normally be a member of the school's senior leadership team. **Substitution costs to the equivalent of 1 day per term for the duration of the project will be provided for the Creative Cluster Coordinator** in addition to the substitution provided for attendance at meetings. The co-ordinator will be responsible for managing the day-to-day operation of the project and will act as a single point of contact for the duration of the project. The other schools in each cluster must nominate one representative to participate in the project

Funding available for each Creative Cluster

Each new 2019 Creative Cluster will receive funding up to a maximum of €7,500. Each school in the Cluster will receive funding of €1,500 to implement their project in the 2019 –2020 school year. It is anticipated that all schools in the Cluster will have a say in how the budget is allocated and spent to support the implementation of the project.

Substitution

In addition, substitution costs will be made available to schools participating in each Cluster. Each school will receive funding to cover four days substitution for attending meetings (one regional meeting and three cluster meetings).

What support is provided to the Creative Clusters?

Selected Clusters can expect support to include the following:

- An initial one day training event for Creative Cluster Coordinators and at least one representative from each of the schools in the Cluster. This will provide an opportunity for schools in the individual Creative Clusters to work together to develop and progress the focus for their Cluster work.

- A specially trained Creative Cluster Facilitator who will support the Cluster for up to **three local Creative Cluster meetings** over the 2019–2020 school year. The Creative Cluster Facilitator will work with the Cluster to support, develop, implement and evaluate an arts and creative learning project which helps participating schools to address a common school issue or development need. The Cluster will have flexibility in how they wish to schedule these meeting times and days, in consultation with their local Education Centre.

- A series of networking opportunities with other schools including other Creative Clusters and schools participating in other Creative Youth initiatives to share learning.

What is a Creative Cluster Facilitator?

The Creative Cluster Facilitator is **not** part of the Creative Cluster Schools. Creative Cluster Facilitators will be expected to:

- Have a reporting and working relationship with the Director of the Education Centre who will lead the Initiative on behalf of the Department of Education and Skills.
- Develop a supportive relationship with the schools in the Cluster acting as a critical friend – supporting and challenging their thinking around the potential for using the arts and creativity to support learning and development and well-being.
- Support the Cluster to experiment, innovate and collaborate on a single collaborative project which helps them address a common issue or development need.
- Support schools to understand and develop the creativity of children, young people and teachers.
- Work with the Cluster on the design, planning and budgeting of the project including ensuring each school has an agreed plan of work to implement between Cluster meetings.
- Identify and link the Cluster with local, regional and national opportunities to engage with arts and culture.
- Work with the Cluster on agreeing the dates, times and focus for the Cluster meetings.
- Ensure that the Planning and Evaluation documents are completed and returned to the relevant Education Centre Director.
- When the project work is complete to support the Cluster to reflect on its learning and ensure it is embedded.

Therefore the role can be filled by either a retired Teacher **(full time Teaching Staff not eligible)**, Artist, Computer Scientist, STEM area, Art & Design, Puppeteer, Actor, Architecture, special interest in Teaching and Learning etc.. The person chosen by the Education Centre will have skills to deliver on the brief outlined and be aligned to the interests and themes chosen and identified by the Cluster.

Remuneration for the Creative Cluster Facilitator – 2019 intake

The Creative Cluster Facilitator will be paid €300/day inclusive of travel and subsistence for 5 days in total.

- 1 x Creative Cluster Facilitator training **6th September 2019, Laois EC**
- 1 x Regional meeting (relevant dates attached)
- 3 x meetings with the cluster in local Education Centre

What is provided for the Education Centre to lead and co-ordinate this initiative?

- Up to a maximum of €7,500 Grant per Creative Cluster - €1,500 per school in each Cluster
- €1,500 for each Creative Facilitator inclusive of T&S (€300 X 5 meetings)
- €500 for administration per Education Centre
- Venue Hire Regional Cluster Workshops (only 6 venues)
- Venue Hire for Creative Cluster meetings (X3)
- Catering Costs for Creative Cluster meetings
- Catering costs for Regional Cluster Workshops (only 6 venues)
- Teacher Travel
- Allocation for Materials per Education Centre for Cluster Meetings up to €200 and Regional Meetings

*Next Steps for participating Education Centres*

- Identify and recruit Creative Cluster Facilitator (to be in place in order to partake in Creative Cluster Facilitator training (**6th September, Laois EC**)
- Identify and get in contact with Lead School Cluster Co-ordinators and with your Nominated School Representatives to outline the dates and locations of the Regional Creative Cluster workshops

ESCI Creative Cluster 6 Regional Workshops - one in each of the ESCI Education Centre network regions.

A series of six regional exploratory workshops will be held in September/October 2019, facilitated by Culture, Creativity & Education (CCE) & DES, with one in each of the ESCI Education Centre network regions. They will take place on the following dates and locations from 9.30am to 3.30 pm each day.

17th September	Dublin (the Ark)	Region 1
18th September	Kilkenny EC	Region 3
19th September	Sligo EC	Region 6
20th September	Laois EC	Region 5
24th September	Kildare EC	Region 2
4th October	Cork EC	Region 4

Creative Clusters Planning Model

Which of the creativity skills do you aim to develop in children and young people? Tick those that apply

☐ **Inquisitive** - Wondering & questioning - Exploring & investigating - Challenging assumptions

☐ **Collaborative** - Co-operating appropriately - Giving and receiving feedback - Sharing the 'product'

☐ **Imaginative** - Playing with possibilities - Making connections - Using intuition

☐ **Persistent** - Tolerating uncertainty - Sticking with difficulty - Daring to be different

☐ **Disciplined** - Crafting and improving - Developing techniques - Reflecting critically

Focus/challenge or area of development for the Creative Clusters project work

Project title and description including the artform (s) or areas of creative practice to be explored

Participating teachers and classes from each school in the Creative Cluster

Approach to involving children and young people in decision making

Added value anticipated from Cluster working

A summary of what the funding will be spent on

Research and Evaluation of Creative Clusters

Thank you for your involvement of the research and evaluation of Creative Clusters. Please note that prior to engaging in *one or more* of the activities presented in the menu below, all relevant parties (BOM, teacher, parents/guardians, children and young people) must have provided informed consent i.e. they must have read (or have read to them) the appropriate information sheet and have signed the appropriate consent form.

Please remind children and young people prior to the activity that their participation is voluntary and that they can opt out at any time (as per consent forms).

Activity menu

1. Focus group interview with a small group of children
Sample questions:
- What worked well?
- What did not work as well as you would like?
- How did your learning change as a result of your participation in the project?
- What did you like about the way decisions were made?
- What did you not like about the way decisions were made?
- What could have been done differently?
- What did you learn that you might not otherwise have learnt (about yourself, about learning, about others etc.)

Remember, these are sample questions. The focus group interview should take no more than 30 minutes.

2. Pick a piece
Children or young people are invited to recall/select one resonant aspect (moment/activity) they particularly liked about the project for which there is a corresponding artefact (e.g. photo, video recording, painting etc.). Children or young people explain what the resonant aspect is and how the corresponding artefact represents it. This activity could be done orally (and recorded by the teacher) or it could be drawn or written.

3. A Book of Meaning
A selection of A4 paper and art materials is made available. Children or young people are invited to make a drawn or written response to the question: what did the (title of the project) mean to me? All responses are collated in a book of meaning.

4. A Wall of Meaning
Children or young people are invited to contribute to a group collage or 'wall of meaning' by compiling a response to the question: what did the (title of the project) mean to me? When the wall of meaning has been completed, children respond (in one sentence) to the question: what does the wall of meaning mean to you? These responses could be oral (and audio-recorded by the teacher) or written.

5. Select a snapshot
Teacher presents a collated catalogue of artefacts associated with the Creative Clusters project. Each child picks, draws and labels 3-4 artefacts important to the story of the project (i.e. if they were to

tell the story of the project using artefacts only, which ones would best represent the project). Artefacts could take the form of, but are not limited to, photographs of plans; designs; props; created pieces; film; sculpture; recorded dance or drama; painting.

6. Rounding up
Children or young people sit in a circle. They are given a few moments to think about what was most meaningful to them about the project. When they have made up their minds they raise their hands. After all hands have been raised, a speaking object is passed around the circle and children/young people tell (in one or two sentences) what was meaningful for them. The round is audio-recorded by the teacher.

7. Make and tell
Children or young people make a collage about the aspects of the project that were meaningful to them. They then sit in a circle. Each child or young person picks three words that would best describe her/his collage. When they have made up their minds they raise their hands. After all hands have been raised, they take turns to hold up their collages and speak the three words they have chosen.

8. Museum of sculptures
In groups of four, each child or young person, in turn, works in silence to mould the other bodies in the group into a sculpture that represents the project for her/him. S/he is invited to provide a caption for her/his sculpture. The sculptures, and accompanying captions, are recorded by the teacher (video recording or photographs). They could also be brought to life for a few seconds! Additionally, the sculptor could give each piece of 'clay' something to say.

9. Acrostics
Children or young people write an acrostic reflecting their experiences of the project.

10. A group poem
Each child or young person could write a line (of poetry) reflecting her/his experiences of the project. Lines could be arranged (which many involve editing) to form either a class poem or a number of small-group poems.