

UPDATE – 2026

IRELAND

**LEEANNE HINCH***Contact: leeanne.hinch@dcu.ie*

The last update to ECHA news about gifted education in Ireland in 2024, outlined Ireland's inclusive education policy, our brief and limited history of gifted education, and the work of the Centre for Talented Youth Ireland within this landscape. Although nothing had formally changed within the country's policies with regards to gifted children at the time, our update finished with a hopeful statement that because of the work that we have been doing, it was felt that the future of gifted education in Ireland was promising. We are delighted to share further updates that we feel indicate positive movements within the field in Ireland, which include new academic appointments, a new Graduate Diploma in Gifted Education, and a very important conference!

The Centre for Talented Youth Ireland (CTYI) remains the only provider of gifted education programmes in Ireland, and the largest within Europe. It is a non-profit organisation based in Dublin City University (DCU) that provides educational programmes for highly able students and since its establishment in 1992 over 90,000 students have participated in classes run by CTYI. CTYI offers a range of programmes, including summer courses, online classes, and Saturday classes, that are designed to challenge and inspire gifted students. CTYI has five major outreach initiatives: The Young Student programme caters for children aged 6 to 12 years, supporting 3,000 students per year. The Older Student programme caters for up to 2,800 students aged 12 to 17 each year. The Centre for Academic Achievement (CAA) works with socioeconomically disadvantaged students from local DEIS schools and typically caters for roughly 180 students per year. The Early Research & Projects Network (ERPNN) is a new programme which started in 2021 and now has over 150 students per year. Finally, the Early University Entrance (EUE) is a programme for Transition Year students and has over 800 students per year. The overarching goal of CTYI is to cater for the

academic and social needs of high ability students based on ability, rather than age, by challenging and stimulating students at a level and pace more suited to their abilities, allowing students to maximise their potential.

In exciting news, Dublin City University (DCU) has appointed Ireland's first two assistant professors in gifted education – Dr. Leeanne Hinch and Dr. Orla Dunne. Along with their work in CTYI, they will also lecture and conduct research with the School of Inclusive Education, in DCU's Institute of Education. In addition to this, ECHA's very own president has recently been promoted. Please join me in congratulating Professor Colm O'Reilly! These appointments mark the first academic positions in gifted education in Ireland, which is a great step forward.

We are delighted to share that as a direct result of these appointments, Dublin City University will begin offering a Graduate Diploma in Gifted Education starting September 2026. This is the first of its kind in Ireland, and will be informed by international research, best practice, and the unique experience of CTYI staff. The graduate diploma is offered entirely online through English, and will be open to parents, teachers, psychologists, and any other interested parties, both within Ireland and internationally. Anyone interested in more information can contact leeanne.hinch@dcu.ie for more details.

In line with this, the research produced in Ireland related to gifted learners has increased dramatically in recent years. There is ongoing work and recent publications in twice-exceptional children, socio-economically disadvantaged gifted children, gifted LGBTQ children, differentiation, AI use for gifted children, early university entrance, and the social and emotional needs of gifted children. This is a trend that we hope to see continue into the future.

Another positive development has been The Saibhriú Project which was launched in Ireland in March 2025 and is due to come to completion at the end of March 2026. (Saibhriú is the Irish word for Enrichment). This project is funded by the Department of Education within the Irish Government and is facilitated by the Education

Learning Centres across Ireland. The aim of the project is to raise awareness of the needs of exceptionally able learners and to share and develop inclusive approaches to providing support for their strengths and their challenges within classrooms and schools across Ireland. As part of this project six geographical clusters across Ireland, including both primary and secondary schools, have formed communities of practice. Within these communities of practice, teachers have received several face-to-face days of professional development input on research, policy and practice related to exceptionally able learners. This has been delivered by the project's academic advisor Prof Niamh Stack (Mary Immaculate College) with guest input from international experts including Professor Margaret Sutherland and Prof Carrie Winstanley and colleagues within CTYI. In parallel the teachers within the communities of practice have worked collaboratively to develop initiatives relevant to supporting exceptional learners within their specific contexts. A key outcome of the project will be a set of freely available case studies which will detail the different initiatives trialled by the communities of practice and the educators' and students' reflections on these - it is anticipated these will be available online later in 2026. An additional element of the project was the design and delivery on a three-week online summer development course by Prof Stack on inclusive approaches for supporting exceptionally able learners which was available to primary school teachers across Ireland - 75 teachers successfully completed this online course in the Summer of 2025.

Finally, we are delighted to welcome the 20th ECHA conference to Dublin in August 2026. We are hosting the conference on our campus at Dublin City University which is the home of CTYI, and the Institute of Education which is Ireland's largest teacher education faculty.

The theme of the conference is Advancing Excellence: Rethinking Gifted Education. We hope to see many of you there!

<https://echa-site.eu>