

Vocational education in Limerick has undergone a gradual but phenomenal change in 14 years

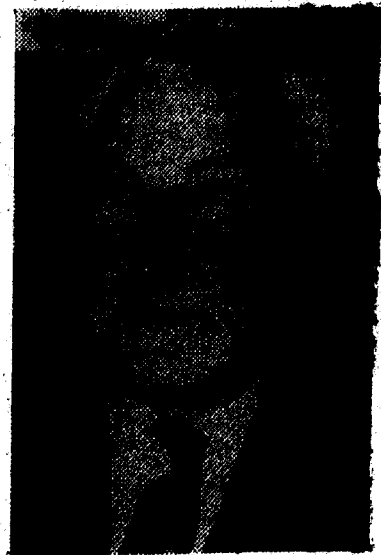
It is confidently believed in educational circles that after the publication of the findings of the Commission on Higher Education, in a few weeks time, it will no longer be possible to regard the Vocational Schools as the cinderellas of our educational system.

For it has long been obvious that the Minister for Education, Dr. Hillery, is anxious to minimise the rift which seems to have grown yearly between Secondary and Vocational schools since the passing of the Vocational Education Act of 1930.

The new Technical Leaving Certificate, if approved, is likely to prove a major factor in putting the Vocational Schools on a firmer footing. For it will then be possible for a Vocational School student to obtain a certificate equal to that of a Secondary School student. And, equally important, the Technical School Leaving Certificate will be recognised by the Universities for matriculation purposes.

In Limerick, where vocational teaching has been going on since 1853, the new status quo may well serve to focus attention on educational facilities which, unknown to many people, have existed in the city for years.

It may come as a surprise to many people to discover that the Limerick City Vocational Education Committee to-day



MR. J. G. O'DONNELL C.E.O.

offers over 30 different courses, ranging from boat-building to the Diploma in Foreign Exchange.

PHENOMENAL CHANGE

For the vocational system in Limerick has been undergoing a gradual yet phenomenal change during the past 14 years. And now, with more than 100 years of history behind it, it at last appears to have come of age.

Vocational education in Limerick began in 1853, when a number of people in Dublin, Cork and Limerick set about establishing and maintaining a society "for the promotion of literature, science, art and music; for the effectual encouragement of agriculture in all its branches, and for the establishment of a library, reading-room and lecture hall in Limerick."

The promoters subscribed a capital sum of £1,256; and having secured a site in Cecil Street for £300, built the Athenaeum Hall. One wonders what these genteel and high-minded gentlemen of the 19th Century would have thought if they knew that 100 years later the scheme they had started would cost an average of £130,000 a year to finance, exclusive of capital expenditure.

New deal for technical schools

In 1896 the trustees handed over the entire scheme to the Corporation, in trust, to administer the property for the advancement of technical education in Limerick. The Corporation

Other courses in this category include the Institute of Cost and Works Accountants, Institute of Marketing and Sales Management, Diploma in Local Administration and examina-

How great is this rift between Secondary and Vocational Schools in Limerick? Several Secondary School masters with whom I discussed the problem were more than critical of the Vocational scheme. "Absolutely no tradition at all... they even allow them to smoke in the classrooms," said one Secondary School master.

of the problem lie in the fact that Ireland, especially this particular part of Ireland, was not quite ready for the type of education the Vocational schools were offering. Industry, prior to the development of the Shannon Industrial Estate, was unknown in most parts of Co. Limerick ten years ago.

To-day the wheel has turned full circle and whether we like it or not there is no denying the fact that we are rapidly approaching the stage where the motif on the old school tie is of secondary importance to the bulk of the wage packet.

(To be concluded).

By MICHAEL O'TOOLE

ation undertook to levy a rate of 1d. in the £, producing about £290 a year.

tions of the Institute of Transport.

The 1930 Act extended vocational education throughout the country. By 1931 there were 1,119 pupils in Limerick vocational schools, 200 of them studying Irish. It is interesting to note that the total enrolment in Irish classes to-day is 35.

But the Committee has had its disappointments, too. In 1958 Limerick became the only centre in Ireland where it was possible to study for the B.Sc. (external) degree of the University of London. The Irish Universities promptly objected to the scheme and hundreds of Limerick people were deprived of obtaining a University degree.

To-day Limerick has seven Vocational Schools with 957 full-time students and 707 attending part-time classes. The Committee employs 55 wholetime teachers and 74 part-time teachers under Chief Executive Officer, Mr. J. G. O'Donnell.

A more recent setback was the closing of the pre-nursing course at St. Anne's Vocational School because, it is claimed, most of the Irish hospital matrons refused to recognise it.

ADVANCED COURSES

In addition to the normal Vocational School subjects, such as woodwork, domestic science, handicrafts, etc., the scheme offers a number of advanced courses. In the School of Commerce, Mulgrave Street, for instance, 13 young men are studying for the examinations of the Chartered Institute of Company Secretaries.

UNDUE DISCRIMINATION?

These two incidents are typical of the many cited by Vocational teachers when they speak about "this undue discrimination" between the secondary and vocational systems. "Why," they ask, "should a hospital Matron accept a girl who has her Leaving Certificate in preference to one who has completed a thorough course in pre-nursing?"

IS IT JEALOUSY?

The Vocational masters, on the other hand, are equally critical. One man was prepared to dismiss the entire problem with one word—jealousy.

"Most secondary and national schools, especially in the country, just cannot compete with us, equipment-wise," he explained. "Flush lavatories are still a luxury in many of the country national schools."

A colleague of his was even more blunt and blamed the Church for causing the rift. It's very much a question of sour grapes," he said. "When Vocational education started in this country the Church didn't want to have anything to do with it. They never realised that it would grow to its present size.

But, perhaps, the true roots

The bus with a built-in lift

The Hamburg Workshop for the Disabled was recently the first rehabilitation centre on the European continent to put a specially constructed bus for disabled persons into operation. The bus has a hydraulically-run hoisting device which lifts the wheel-chair passengers into the bus. 33 youths are at present employed at the Hamburg workshop. They are bodily so disabled that they could not normally be employed once they finished schooling. As some of the boys and girls are unable to use public transportation, an auto concern developed this special bus. Price: 33,000 DM

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Commerce and saw advertisement in it were running a bus and Killarney. He go on this tour. disgusted to find that had been discontinued ember 10, yet the e publication he had Sept. 20/Sept. 26,

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