



*“The new Scoilnet allows us to share our resources”
– www.scoilnet.ie*

A new version of Scoilnet – the Department of Education’s portal for Irish education, managed by the PDST Technology in Education – was launched formally on 27 May. The site, which has annual traffic close to two million visits, has been totally redeveloped and bears little resemblance to the old one, which had been in existence for over ten years.

Scoilnet 2014 is now designed chiefly for a teacher audience and does not focus on students and parents – though the content may be useful to all audiences and can still be accessed freely without the need to sign in. The core role of the site remains the provision of curriculum relevant digital resources to assist teaching and learning and there are currently over 11,000 resources, including lesson plans, presentations, notes, activities and quizzes, in the site’s database. Indeed, during the development period around 2,000 links were removed either because they were old, obsolete or just not good enough.

Faceted and federated

Accessing or finding resources is now done mainly through a search box and what is termed a faceted search which allows teachers to narrow their searches to specific sections of the curriculum after they have initially searched for a word or term. Teachers have the option of refining the search results by subject, class level, resource type and in some cases language – think of hotel booking websites and you will see the similarity. The new format presents results far quicker than the old model which required clicking through various dropdowns before being presented with results.

The search also picks up federated

results from Encyclopaedia Britannica, the Ask About Ireland website and the thousands of images from the ImageBank project. Many of the resources on Scoilnet are also in turn federated through European Schoolnet’s Learning Resource Exchange (LRE) and the potential exists for further federation of Scoilnet material to external portals.

A unique selling point of using Scoilnet remains the fact that all the resources on the site have been either reviewed by teachers for their relevance to the Irish curriculum or used by them in the classroom.

Sharing resources

The biggest innovation on the new site is the facility for us as teachers to upload our own resources and share them with the wider education community. Anyone uploading a resource will need to be registered with the Teaching Council and activate a Scoilnet Account thus ensuring that the material shared comes from teachers working to the Irish curriculum. The description fields or ‘metadata’ are completed by the ‘sharing teacher’ and are very curriculum specific. In addition, there are built in filters to ensure inappropriate language is blocked though unfortunately there are no automated checks on grammar!

Already, over the summer and in the first few weeks of September around one hundred resources (presentations, documents and website links) have been uploaded and shared independently.

Once signed in with our Scoilnet account, we as teachers can add resources to a list of favourites and share with others. On the dashboard you will see the resources you have shared (you can make further edits to the descriptions) as well as

your favourites and tailored news specific to your class.

While the emphasis on the new site is directed towards the search component some of the popular content features from the old Scoilnet have been carried through to the new site. More than 50 themepages support a thematic approach



to teaching but the big improvement with these collections is that all of the resources within them can now be found independently through the site search.

User research

The new look and feel for Scoilnet was informed by extensive user research undertaken during the summer of 2013. Hundreds of you engaged in an online questionnaire covering your behaviour and attitudes to education websites. A separate cohort of teachers took part in six moderated focus groups at venues in Dublin and Cork with the findings from all research then directing the future direction and development of the new site.

Scoilnet is managed on a day-to-day basis by a team of three at the PDST Technology in Education at their offices at Dublin City University but a number of teachers are engaged from time to time on part-time contracts to edit specific subjects.

*PATRICK COFFEY, Project Officer,
Scoilnet, PDST Technology in
Education*