

PERFECT MATCH AS EDUCATION TO REMAIN 'SACRED' IN DINGLE

James Ó Dubháin, Pobalscoil Chorca Dhuibhne

'Cleamhnas,' the practice of arranged marriages, makes a welcome return to West Kerry, albeit in the guise of a match very different to its predecessors. The recent pairing of an old stalwart in Dingle CBS and its new suitor, Connecticut based Sacred Heart University will result in the preservation of an important aspect, the continued provision of education in the area.

Having served the town for close to 160 years, Dingle CBS closed its doors as a secondary school in May 2007. Situated in a prominent location, it was hoped that the listed buildings, history and ethos of the school would remain if a suitable buyer could be found. Prospective partners would have to offer an educational dowry of note in exchange for inheriting the family silver.

Having flirted with various entities and suits over the years, the administrative matchmakers have accepted an offer that will preserve and maintain the practices of the past and produce some interesting offspring in the future.

The CBS began with a mission to educate the 'poor boys of Dingle' therefore an educational component was a mandatory requirement to entertain any proposal of purchase. The perfect match was found in the private Catholic institution that is Sacred Heart University.

Initially invited to send students to Dingle's 'An Díseart' by Monsignor Ó Fiannachta in 2004, the university later increased its programme for international study. With the popularity of the programme gaining more traction in Connecticut, the university made the move to purchase the Dingle CBS site and further develop its educational commitment to the town and develop a permanent international campus.

'By 2018 we would expect close to 300 US students studying short term and semester long courses' says Campus Director Sean Pól Ó Conchúir. 'New courses have been introduced and each year brings new courses. These will be linked to aspects synonymous with the town, marine biology and tourism being examples.' The Campus Director also pointed out that Nursing courses have been offered for the past number of years and continue to exist and expand thanks to support from I.T. Tralee, The Bons Secour hospital and the West Kerry Community Hospital. Community support has also been very forthcoming. 'Local businesses have been very instrumental in assisting the university up to this point. They have provided guest speakers, internships and Údarás na Gaeltachta have made grants available.' The University's decision to marry into the area is a boon for the peninsula as Seán Pól points out, 'The commitment of over 1 million dollars towards the campus development is fantastic for the town and in particular for the Dingle CBS site.'

The Christian Brothers' stipulation of an educational match has been well and truly met. Sacred Heart continues its links with Dingle secondary school Pobalscoil Chorca Dhuibhne through its educational system comparison module in its January programme, as students under the tutelage of Mike Giarratano study the Irish model and mingle happily with second level pupils. Sacred Heart will continue to operate from its original home at An Díseart until the new campus is ready.

As Sean Pól Ó Conchúir points out 'Fite Fuaite' is an Irish expression that captures that which is interwoven. Dingle CBS and Sacred Heart Connecticut are a prime example of this, an educational match that entwines many links.'

It is anticipated that once planning regulations have been met, S.H.U.'s Dingle Campus will take approximately 18 months to complete.