



National Centre for STEM Education

EPI•STEM NEWS ITEM: MONDAY, 13TH DECEMBER 2021

ABOUT EPI•STEM: The National Centre for STEM Education (Part I)

EPI•STEM *The National Centre for STEM Education* started in the University of Limerick in 2008 with support and financial investment from the *Higher Education Authority* (HEA) and from the *University of Limerick* (UL President's Letter, 31st July 2008). Since then, it has become a Research Centre of strategic national policy importance in STEM education, connected to world-renowned professors of EPI•STEM education and with an impressive publications output in the international academic literature. Originally housed in the Office of the Vice President Academic Research (Professor Paul McCutcheon) at the University of Limerick from 2008 to 2014, the Centre later moved, in 2014, to the School of Education and the Faculty of Education and Health Sciences.

EPI•STEM *The National Centre for STEM Education* is not a virtual Centre, it occupies an impressive physical presence on the first floor of the main building at the University of Limerick (UL) with offices, meeting rooms, display areas and a conference room/STEM design laboratory. Spaces used for conferences, visiting professors and fellows, and other STEM related research and development activities. The central hub in EPI•STEM has rooms for the Director, Executive Administrator, the PDMT team and key personnel connected to a variety of research and development projects. The STEM Design Laboratory houses artefacts and resources connected to STEM Education in Ireland and acts as a physical space for visiting STEM researchers, STEM pedagogy workshops, STEM Conferences, meetings with researchers and in-career teachers in STEM subjects and professional subject associations. It has a Researcher Laboratory for current STEM researchers working on STEM research and development activities and for visiting scholars in the field.

Besides visiting fellows, postdoc researchers, completed doctoral and master's theses and internal EPI•STEM Associates inside the University of Limerick, the Centre has significant partnerships made at national, regional and local level with school leaders, professional subject associations and all government policy actors in STEM education in Ireland.

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Since the start date of 2008, and through its various research and development programs the Centre has brought in sizeable research funding, in the region of Euro 15 million to the University of Limerick. The Centre continues to date to seek out, and to successfully win competitive grant-awards and research funding. The Centre reports to the Head of the School of Education and the UL Research Office.

The Professional Diploma in Mathematics for Teaching PDMT program

The *Professional Diploma in Mathematics for Teaching* PDMT program (2012-2024) is a fully funded programme by the *Department of Education and Skills* (DES), for upskilling out-of-field mathematics teachers in Ireland. The PDMT occupies pride of place as a flagship program at the heart of the Centre and fulfills the Teaching Council's subject requirement for mathematics teaching. The PDMT is a partnership with six *Higher Education Institutes* (HEIs) managed by EPI•STEM with a National Coordinator (Dr. Peggy E. Lynch) and National Administrator (Niamh P. O'Brien), local lecturers, support personnel and a research team of world-renowned mathematics educators, including Adjunct Professor Merrilyn Goos. The PDMT program is academically moderated by an External Examiner. Adjunct Professor Elizabeth Oldham from Trinity College Dublin was a former External Examiner and today by, Professor Ann O'Shea, Professor Mathematics and Statistics at NUI Maynooth.

The PDMT program has to date produced over 1,200 original resources for teaching mathematics. Now, with the support of a HEA Performance Fund for *Building Teachers Knowledge*, these resources are being adapted as on-line CPD resources for all mathematics and science teachers in Ireland. Contact the HEA project Administrator Martina.Ryan@ul.ie if you want to know more about this research and development project.

EPI•STEM fulfills the aims of the UL@50 Strategic Plan for transforming STEM education in Ireland, having a global reach in Research Excellence, making an impact in the Irish policy landscape, attracting international world-renowned professors in STEM Education, and contributing to STEM education in local schools. Former Directors of the Centre are members of the International Advisory Panel: Adjunct Professor Sibel Erduran, Professor of Science Education and Director of Research at the Department of Education, University of Oxford, Professor Emeritus John O'Donoghue, University of Limerick and Adjunct Professor Merrilyn Goos, Professor of Education, University of the Sunshine Coast, Australia.

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EPI•STEM reaches out nationally through significant collaborations and links with STEM teachers, students, parents/guardians and other centres, agencies, schools, HEI institutes and community groups. For example, PDMT (6 HEIs), DES, HEA, NCCA, Teaching Council, NALA, Irish Science Teachers Association, Irish Mathematics Teachers Association, Irish Applied Mathematics Teachers Association, Engineering and Technology Teachers Association, ETBs, primary and post-primary schools, SFI, industry, Engineers Ireland, Mallow Schools Science and Mathematics Project, Mallow Science and Mathematics Fair.

Leadership of the Centre

- Professor John O'Donoghue (Mathematics) and Dr George McClelland (Physics), leaders of the original successful UL bid, were appointed Co-Directors in 2008. Professor O'Donoghue was Co-Director until 2011, and served as Director until 2014.
- In order to advance the work and reputation of EPI•STEM, UL appointed the first Chair of STEM Education in Ireland, Professor Sibel Erduran, as Director in 2014.
- Professor Merrilyn Goos became the Chair in STEM Education and Director in 2017.
- The current Director, appointed by the Dean and the President of the University of Limerick on 12th June 2021 is Dr. Geraldine Mooney Simmie, a Senior Lecturer in the School of Education with a research specialism in the area of *Teacher Professional Learning and Social Justice*. The Co-Director is Dr. Niamh O'Meara, a Lecturer in Mathematics Education in the School of Education. Helen Fitzgerald is the Executive Administrator of EPI•STEM.

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