

## Education Visit to Ireland

I joined a tour to Ireland during the period from 8 December 2013 to 14 December 2013. It was organized by the Irish Chinese Society Galway (ICSG) and coordinated by the Irish International Education Centre (IIEC), Hong Kong Office. Eight secondary school principals, senior teachers and consultants were in the delegation (see photo below).



The purpose of the visit was to learn more about the tertiary education provided in Ireland and, in particular, the opportunity of tertiary education in Ireland for Hong Kong students.

The itinerary of the tour was very tight. During the tour, the delegation (we) visited one secondary school (with secondary, primary and kindergarten sections), two institutes of technology, three universities and one private Hotel and Catering School. We visited the Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) that formulates the qualifications and standards of education for Ireland. We also paid a visit to the Chinese Embassy in Ireland.

Travelling to Ireland was rather tiring. On the outward journey, it took us nine hours from Hong Kong to fly to Dubai, where we had a two-hour transit. Then we spent about eight hours in the flight to Dublin, the capital city of Ireland.

It was Sunday morning of 9<sup>th</sup> December 2013 when we landed Dublin. We reached Travelodge Hotel at St Stephen Green, Dublin in early afternoon, had lunch in a Japanese restaurant and then went to Trinity College Dublin. We visited the famous Old Library in the college. It got dark at around 4pm when Ireland has shorter day time in winter.

Being very tired and having jetlag, we returned to the hotel quickly. In the first evening, we had dinner at the Good World Chinese Restaurant where the food was very good. After that, some members went out for sight-seeing during the evening. I stayed in the hotel, settled down and fell asleep soon partly because I have had very little sleep over the previous 24 hours while in the planes, and partly because the morning call was 6:30am and we had to start the next day journey leaving the hotel at 8:00am. I had excellent sleep during the first night in Ireland.

On the next day, 10<sup>th</sup> December 2013, the breakfast was a full Continental one and the food on a standard plate was so much that people of my age should refrain from having it all. So I ate only some of it, had some varieties of fruit and took some milk and oats to keep myself as healthy as possible in order to keep myself in good shape to meet the demand of the tight schedule of the week.

The first school we visited was Dundalk Grammar School. The school runs a typical Irish pre-university system: 2 years of kindergarten for children aged five, 6 years of primary school, 3 years of junior secondary and 3 years of senior secondary education, followed by a common examination----the Irish Leaving Certificate Examination.

There is one special arrangement for the Secondary 4 students---the Secondary 4 year is a transition year in which students will explore their own interests or aspirations by studying a few subjects of students' choice and/or trying out their preferred profession or occupation in work placements arranged by the school, or students may take this year as a gap year in which they go to different places in the world to work or to travel or to do both. In some schools, if students do not want to do these activities during their Secondary 4 year, they may proceed directly to Secondary 5 to study the subjects they decide and take the Leaving Certificate Examination at the end of their Secondary 6 year.

The Dundalk Grammar School runs kindergarten, primary and secondary sections and is a through-train school with some boarding facilities for secondary boys and girls. Students may study there from kindergarten to Secondary 6. Class size was small particularly in the kindergarten and primary sections. In the secondary section, class size was larger but much smaller than we have in most Hong Kong schools. Our visit to Dundalk Grammar school was reported in the local news below.

# Senior Chinese educators pay visit to Grammar school

DUNDALK GRAMMAR School hosted a visit of senior educators from Hong Kong in late December.

The delegation, including school principals, school inspectors, and curriculum advisors, was led by Anthony Cheng of the Irish International Education Centre, Hong Kong and Kam Chin, Chairperson of the Irish Chinese Society, Galway.

Mr. Chin said that, 'We hope this visit will give the delegation an

insight into Irish quality education and Irish schools'. The visit also aimed to promote stronger cultural and educational links between Ireland and Hong Kong. During their week in Ireland the group visited a number of institutions for higher and further education.'

They also met with representatives of Enterprise Ireland as well as visiting Leinster House on the invitation of Senator Mary Moran.

'Dundalk Grammar School was the only school included on their itinerary and they said that they were very impressed with what they saw in the school, particularly the innovative work being undertaken as part of the Transition year programme.'

On returning to Hong Kong they intend to use their insights by contributing to an Irish week being planned for February 2014.

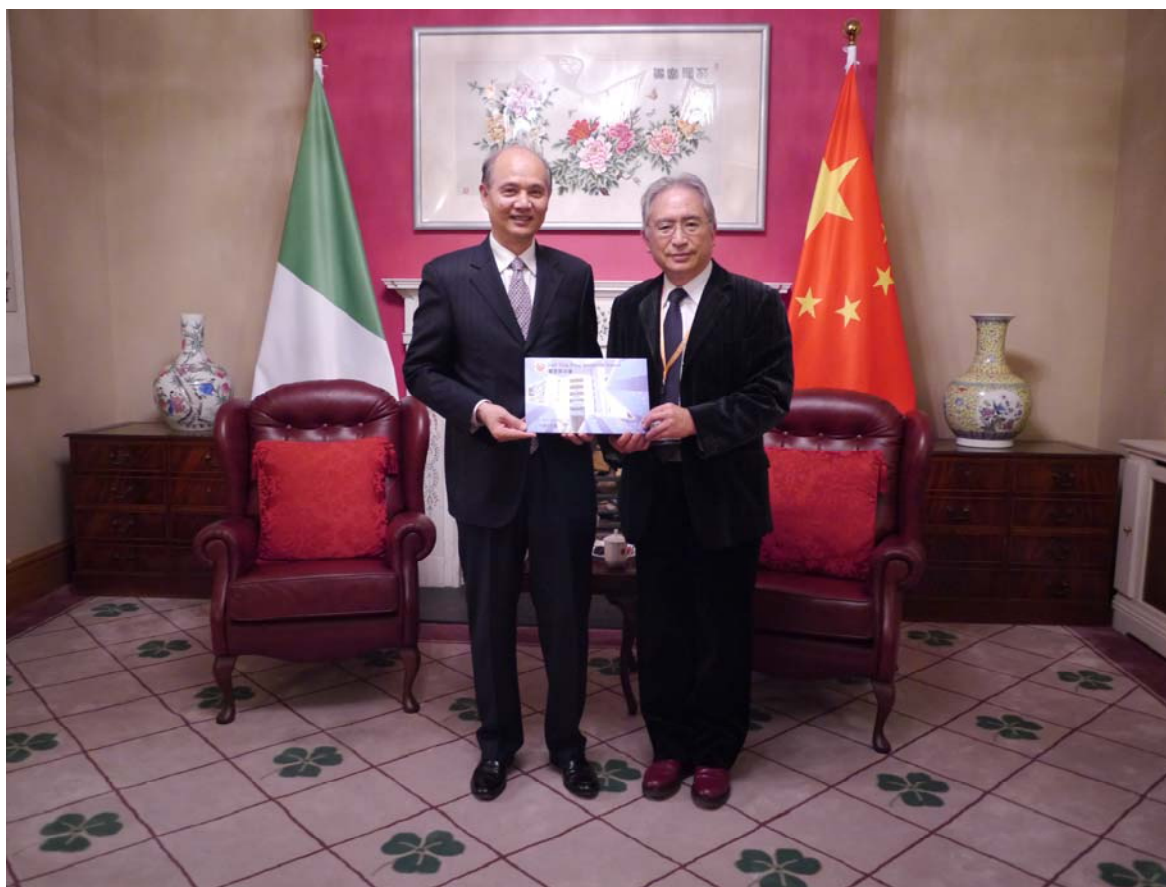


■ Teacher Scott Nowell shows off one of the F1 cars produced with the new 3D printer during the Chinese delegation's visit to Dundalk Grammar School.

After visiting Dundalk Grammar School, we went to Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT), where we visited different classes on bakery, culinary arts and hotel management. The courses are of great interest to us as students have a wide choice of career-oriented disciplines in the institute to which they may study from bachelor degree level up to PhD.

In the evening, we paid a visit to the Chinese Embassy, where we were warmly received. The ambassador Mr. Luo Linquan had an hour of talk with us explaining to us that Ireland has a very good relationship with mainland China and that Ireland may be a good place for Asian students to study for degree awards. He told us that he welcomed Chinese students to go to the Embassy and that he would arrange them to play ping-pong there.

Each member of the delegation took a photo with Mr. Luo who is very friendly indeed. The photo below shows the presentation of the LTPSS souvenir to Mr. Luo, the Chinese ambassador.



After leaving the Chinese Embassy, we had dinner at Good World Chinese Restaurant again but this time we had much lighter food. We got back to the hotel at around 8:00pm.

On the third day, 11<sup>th</sup> December 2013, we got up as early as before and we went to the Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) in the morning after breakfast. The officers in charge at QQI received us and explained carefully to us the 10-level qualification ladder called the national framework of qualifications (NFQ) of Ireland, which is different from the 7-level qualification framework we have in Hong Kong. We stayed there for about two hours and then travelled in our coach to the University College Dublin (UCD).

UCD is an international university with many foreign students and provides a variety of courses like most of the universities in Hong Kong. We were guided through the different courses provided. After being treated with sandwich lunch at UCD, we travelled to Dublin City University, where we were briefed on the characteristics of the university and the courses provided. The officers of the universities were kind and sincere and always gave us a lot of details about the courses their

institutes offer to students.

An unexpected visit was arranged for us in the evening of the third day. The Honorable Senator Mary Moran invited us to visit the Houses of the Parliament of Ireland. There we were introduced to the history of the Houses of Parliament, guided to see around the places in them. We were even led into the court room to observe the live debate of a bill (a bill of water charges to be levied on households) to be passed. Before the debate, all members in the room formally welcomed us, the Hong Kong delegation, before they formally started their debate and voting for the bill. The following is the photo taken of the Hong Kong delegation in front of the Houses of Parliament with Senator Mary Moran.



We then travelled to Galway in our coach. The journey took about two hours in the evening. We checked in to Salthill Hotel of Galway rather late in the evening. Despite that, we had a lovely dinner with very good food. The hotel is nice and the accommodation is on the whole very good, comparable to a grade 4 hotel in Hong Kong.

On the fourth day, 12<sup>th</sup> December 2013, we got up as early as usual but had breakfast at 8:00am so that we had more sleeping time during the previous night. We were taken to the Galway City Centre and the Christmas Market.

Much to our surprise, we were received by the ex-Mayor of Galway, Councilor Terry O’Flaherty, and the present Mayor of Galway, Councilor Pdraig Conneely, at the entrance to the Christmas Market. They gave us a warm and heartfelt welcome. We had a wonderful gathering and talk there and some of us sang Irish songs together with the Mayor and the lady councilor loudly and happily. Our happy gathering and singing attracted quite a large number of passers-by. Some of them volunteered to hold the cameras and help take a number of photos for us. What follows is one of the photos.



Soon after that, we were taken to a bakery shop in the City of Galway accompanied by the ex-Mayor. The owner of the shop, Mr. Jimmy Griffin, happened to be one of the lecturers of bakery classes in DIT we visited on the second day, 10<sup>th</sup> December 2013. We were served with the best bread and coffee in his shop (see photo below).



Mr. Griffin showed us a very big bread baked at his shop and many of us in turn took a photo of the big bread with ourselves and Mr. Griffin. The photo below shows Mr. Griffin and me with the big bread.



After leaving the bakery shop, we visited the Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology (GMIT), which is one of the fourteen institutes of technology in Ireland. These institutes are quite similar to those of Hong Kong providing industry or work oriented degrees except that they offer other career-oriented degree courses such as culinary arts.

Following the visit to GMIT, we went to the National University of Ireland Galway (NUIG). Like every other national university of Ireland, the quality of teaching is of a very high standard and it provides a wide range of disciplines or courses for students to be studied to different levels of qualification ranging from the bachelor degree to PhD. I was responsible for presenting the souvenir to Dr. Brain Hughes, the Dean of International Office of the university (see photo below).



Before we had dinner back at the hotel, we visited the Irish International Hotel and Catering School (IIHCS). The school is housed in a hotel, which was turned into a school for the purpose. The courses provided include culinary arts, hotel management and commercial studies. Students study level 5 and 6 courses there. On satisfactory completion of the level 6 courses, students will be admitted into the first year or second year of a degree course of similar disciplines in one of the institutes of technology or universities depending on the overall performance of the students.

In visiting the culinary class, I was recognized by two ex-students of mine who studied in Law



Ting Pong Secondary School (LTPSS) in the previous year (2013-14). One of them, Kenny Chan studied in LTPSS in Secondary 4T and the other, Kong Pok Wui, in Secondary 6S. Now they are studying in IIHCS respectively in level 5 and level 6 courses. Meeting old friends overseas, we had quite a long and close talk in the school.

According to the principal of IIHCS, both of them are doing very well in their studies. The senior student, Kong Pok Wui, is expected to complete the level 6 course with a good result and is expected to be admitted into the second year of a degree course in commercial studies in one of the universities of Ireland in the 2014-15 school year, while the junior alumnus, Kenny Chan, who aspires to become a chef, is expected to complete level 6 culinary arts at the close of the school year 2014-15 and enter either one of the institutes of technology to study a degree course to prepare him for becoming a professional chef or as a first year student studying hotel management should he be interested in academic studies and able to pass the required internal examinations.

The two ex-students were requested to write an essay about their studies in Ireland. The essays were received before the Chinese New Year and they are attached.

Below is a photo taken of myself with the two alumni of Law Ting Pong Secondary School who are now studying at IIHCS.



This meeting with ex-students in Ireland was a great surprise and a happy encounter to me. I immediately informed the supervisor and principal of Law Ting Pong Secondary School of the good news by WhatsApp.

In Ireland there, the two boys have made a difference just in three months---they are studying hard, contrary to what they were in Hong Kong. They told me that Ireland is a quiet place and a good place to study because there are fewer distractions from their studies and hence they are more able to concentrate on their work and studies. Another reason for their improvement, the boys told me, is the much smaller class size, about 7 to 8 students in a class, where they can get much more and better individual attention there.

Going back to the Salthill Hotel quite late in the evening, we had another good dinner and then went to bed as quickly as possible since we all got rather tired having gone through the very tight schedule of visiting so many nice places and having been given so much stuff of rich information in the past four days.

On the fifth day, 12<sup>th</sup> December 2013, we got up early as usual, had breakfast quickly and set off for the south part of Ireland. It took the coach nearly four hours travelling from Galway to Cork amidst the rainy weather. We have been very fortunate in the first four days when the weather was fine with sunlight most of the day time, but starting the fifth day, we were told, the weather had become normal again with regular rain and a dim atmosphere in non-summer time. The weather got colder then. At around noon time we got to the last university we planned to go----the University College Cork (UCC), one of the seven universities of Ireland.

The tour round the campus was well organized and we had a good grasp of the courses provided and learned some secret knowledge about Ireland otherwise not obtainable from elsewhere. We were led into a room located in the top of a tower of the University Wall which was said to be once used by the Irish Republican Army (IRA).

Lunch at UCC was arranged in one of the college canteens, which was decent and comfortable. The food offered was nice and affordable for students. The photo below shows the presentation of a LTPSS souvenir by me to Mr. Trevor Holmes, Vice President of UCC.



After leaving UCC, we went to visit the English Market in the Cork City Centre. Because of the cold and rainy weather, we spent only about an hour to tour around the place and quickly got back to our coach and started our journey back to Galway. The few hours' journey gave most of us a good time to sleep in the coach before we got back to Galway in late evening when we had another marvelous dinner in the hotel.

We went to bed as early as possible to get ourselves better prepared for another 24-hour journey back to Hong Kong the next day, 13<sup>th</sup> December 2013.

Despite this, we were happy that we had obtained so much information about the courses available in those institutes visited (among the fourteen institutes of technology and seven universities of Ireland) during this tour. We will be able to disseminate it to our students and students of Hong Kong at large who may find the opportunities of further studies appropriate to their own situations.

On the whole, Ireland is a tranquil place filled with fresh air and green areas. The people are friendly and nice and life is comfortable and rather leisurely. There are so many institutes of technology and universities there that students who work reasonably hard could generally get into a degree course without much competition. It is therefore a place of study suitable for students who

find competition for university places too keen for them in Hong Kong.

The cost of living and the fees are reasonable and may be affordable to many families who find other countries of further study like the UK, the States, Australia or New Zealand too expensive. In that case, Ireland, though a European country, offers a good quality English-speaking tertiary education environment for Hong Kong students to pursue their further studies at degree level or above.

To know more about the opportunities for further education in Ireland, IIEC will be organizing an Irish Week in Hong Kong in February 2014. Interested parents and students may make use of this opportunity to learn more about them.

For the information of the students of Law Ting Pong Secondary School, the lecturers and officers of some Irish universities and institutes of technology will return their visit to our school in the afternoon of Friday, 21<sup>st</sup> February 2014 and they will also give the senior students a talk on the study opportunities on further studies in Ireland.

(Reported by Mr. Stephen LUI, Curriculum Consultant of Law Ting Pong Secondary School who was on a duty visit to Ireland from 8<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> December 2014 sponsored by the Irish Chinese Society Galway (ICSG))