A Qualitative Study

'*An Exploration of the Role of the School Secretary/Administrator in the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee' (CDVEC)*

Doctorate in Education (Ed. D)
Dublin City University
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Approval Page

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Dedication

To

School Secretaries/Administrators

working in the schools and colleges

of

The City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee (CDVEC)

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Abstract

'An Exploration of the Role of the School Secretary/Administrator in the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee' (CDVEC)

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The objective of this study is to examine the role of the school secretary/administrator in CDVEC and to make recommendations that will improve the understanding of the role and performance for the benefit of all stakeholders.   In completing the study the researcher consulted with stakeholder representatives as to their understanding of the importance of the role.

CDVEC is the largest VEC in the Republic of Ireland. It delivers a broad range of educational courses and provides a wide variety of complementary and supplementary services. The focus of this study is on the school secretaries/administrators who work in the twenty- two schools and colleges.

The conceptual framework in which the investigative component of the research was carried out was based on a critical theory approach. It focused on best practices in school administration and research carried out in New York and London which was included in the research analysis and served to enrich perspectives and findings.

The study was completed in the context of huge change in education and education administration. Many of the legislative and curriculum changes that have taken place over the past decade has impacted heavily on the role and responsibility of the secretary/administrator. Very little research has been carried out on this subject in Ireland to date. As a result very little discussion and change has occurred on how secretaries/ administrators can be upskilled to help them with the many changes implemented and with many more to come.

The research findings identified a range of key issues that if addressed would be of benefit to the students and other key stakeholders. Many aspects of the role are clarified and recommendations are made as to how it can support and influence future improvements in CDVEC education.

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Abbreviations

APO	Assistant Principal Officer
ASA	Admin Staff Association
ATI	Accounting Technician Ireland
BBS	Bachelor of Business Studies
BTEA	Back to Education Allowance
BTEI	Back to Education Initiative
BTEC	Back to Education Certificate
CA	Conversation Analysis
CDU	Curriculum Development Unit (CDVEC)
CDVEC	City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee
CIMS	Student Data Base Managed by School Secretary
DA	Discourse Analysis
DES	Department of Education and Skills (Formerly Science)
DIT	Dublin Institute of Technology
DCU	Dublin City University
DOE	District Office of Education
EGFSN	Expert Group on Future Skills Needs
ESOL	English for Speakers of other languages
EU	European Union
FE	Further Education

FĀS	Foras Āiseanna Saothair (Training & Employment Authority)
FETAC	Further Education and Training Awards Council
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNP	Gross National Product
HEA	Higher Education Authority
HR	Human Resource
HSE	Health Service Executive
ICTU	Irish Congress of Trade Union
IMI	Irish Management Institute
IMPACT	Irish Municipal Public & Civil Trade Union
ITEC	International Therapy Examining Council
IVEA	Irish Vocational Education Association
JC	Junior Cycle
LCA	Leaving Certificate Applied
LCVP	Leaving Certificate Vocational Preparation
LGPSU	Local Government Public Service Union
MSc	Master of Science
NCSE	National Council for Special Education
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
NLN	National Learning Network
NPAVSCC	National Parents Association for Vocational Schools and Community Colleges
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

PLC	Post Leaving Certificate
PO	Principal Officer
PWT	Permanent Wholetime Teacher
RPL	Repeat Leaving Certificate
SC	Senior Cycle
SCC	Sports and Cultural Council (CDVEC)
SUN	Purchasing Order System Managed by School Secretary
TUI	Teachers Union of Ireland
UCD	University College Dublin
UFT	United Federation of Teachers Union
VTOS	Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme

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Chapter 1

Introduction

'An Exploration of the role of the School Secretary/Administrator in the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee (CDVEC)'

Introduction

This study followed on from many years of experience of working as a school secretary in the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee (CDVEC). The researcher has worked as a Grade 111 Clerical Officer and Grade IV Assistant Staff officer in school administration from 1997 to March 2011 and has covered all the responsibilities of the secretary's role at both junior and senior level.

The objective of this study is to examine the role of the school secretary in CDVEC with a view to recommending improvements in the job specification that will benefit all stakeholders. The researcher consulted with a number of stakeholder representatives on their views of the role and how it could be better designed to support the current VEC education system.

1 Researcher Profile

The researcher has been a member of the administrative staff of the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee (CDVEC) for twenty-nine years. CDVEC is the largest of the thirty-three vocational committees in Ireland. She has eight years experience in the HR department of CDVEC in the teaching recruitment section, five years in CDVEC Curriculum Development Unit in the Post Leaving Certificate area and fifteen years administrative experience in the schools and colleges of CDVEC. The

researcher has also fifteen years experience of teaching part-time in the evening school of one of CDVEC's colleges to students undertaking the two year Irish Management Institute (IMI) Certificate in Supervisory Management course.

The researcher has a long commitment to lifelong learning. She herself returned to education as a mature student in 1988 to undertake the IMI Certificate in Supervisory Management course. She had completed her Leaving Certificate in 1973 that was followed by a one- year intensive commercial course. In 1974 she commenced a five-year career as 'secretary' to the Matron of the Rotunda Hospital, Dublin. In 1982 she commenced employment in CDVEC.

Following the completion of the IMI certificate course she set this course up in one of CDVEC's colleges. She taught the first year of the course for fifteen years. She met students from all walks of life including those from both public and private sectors that were seeking to gain a qualification in supervisory management. The subjects of the first year were Management Theory and Practice, Psychology and Work, Management Techniques and Communications. The second year subjects were Personnel Management, Management Techniques 11 and Business Environment. The researcher has always found the application of the theory and practical experiences from those undertaking the course invaluable in her own working career.

It was a lifelong ambition of the researcher to undertake a degree course of study and in 1996 she fulfilled this ambition. She commenced a four-year Bachelor of Business Studies (BBS) that included Trade Union studies through distance learning and lectures at the Michael Smurfit Business School of University College Dublin (UCD). This programme of study was the first of its kind and funded partly by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICT). CDVEC refunded the remaining balance of fees on the successful passing of examinations at the end of each year. The researcher graduated

in 2000 with a 2.1 honours degree and a first class honours in her dissertation 'An Examination of the Learning Experiences of Adults who undertook the IMI Certificate in Supervisory Management course'.

In 2000 the researcher commenced a two years Master's programme in Education Management and Training (M.Sc) in Dublin City University (DCU). Her supervisor for the BBS degree course was completing this programme of study at the time and felt it would be most beneficial to the researcher. In the first year of the programme she carried out a qualitative action research study that involved the students on the IMI course that she was teaching. The aim of this research was to improve her practice in teaching by including the views of her students. She found the findings from this study most beneficial to her teaching practice at the time. It is also a philosophy she still uses in her administration career. Her dissertation for the final year of the MSc was a qualitative study of the training in place for the administrative staff of CDVEC. She graduated in 2002 obtaining a 2.1. honours degree. The researcher continued working full-time by day as an administrative person in her current role and by night as a part-time lecturer on the IMI course until 2006 when she ceased teaching to undertake this professional doctorate programme of study.

1.1   The Role of the Researcher in CDVEC

The CDVEC staff handbook (2007, p.24) describes how all appointments are to the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee. Administrative staff may be assigned to any centre of CDVEC which includes any of the vocational schools or further education colleges within the scheme.

The staff handbook (2007, p.51) outlines the grading structures for the administrative staff in CDVEC from Grade 111 to APO (Assistant Principal

Officer) level. At local level in some of the schools and colleges administrative staff are referred to as 'school secretaries'. In some of the further education colleges they are called 'administrators' and 'administrative' staff. For the purpose of this study the researcher will use the term 'school secretary'.

The current role of the researcher is that of Grade IV Assistant Staff Officer. She is a senior administrative staff member in a large vocational school responsible for providing an administrative support to the principal, deputy principal, teachers, students, parents, community and other stakeholders with whom she interacts. To carry out this role she is assisted by one Grade 111 clerical officer and the services of a temporary clerical officer for fifteen hours per week term time to assist with the evening school programme in the college. Fig. 1.1 shows the four key areas of responsibility of the researcher in her role as 'school secretary'.

The Four Key Areas of Responsibility for the

School Secretary

COLLEGE STAFF

Principal/ Deputy
Teachers (Day & Night)
Co-ordinators
Admin & Maintenance Staff

PROGRAMMES

JC, SC, RPL
PLC
Adult Education
VTOS, BTEA, BTEI

CLIENTELE
Students
Parents
General Public
Primary/Secondary Schools
Community

ORGANISATIONS

CDVEC /Head Office.
DES
Education Services
Certifying Bodies
Partnerships
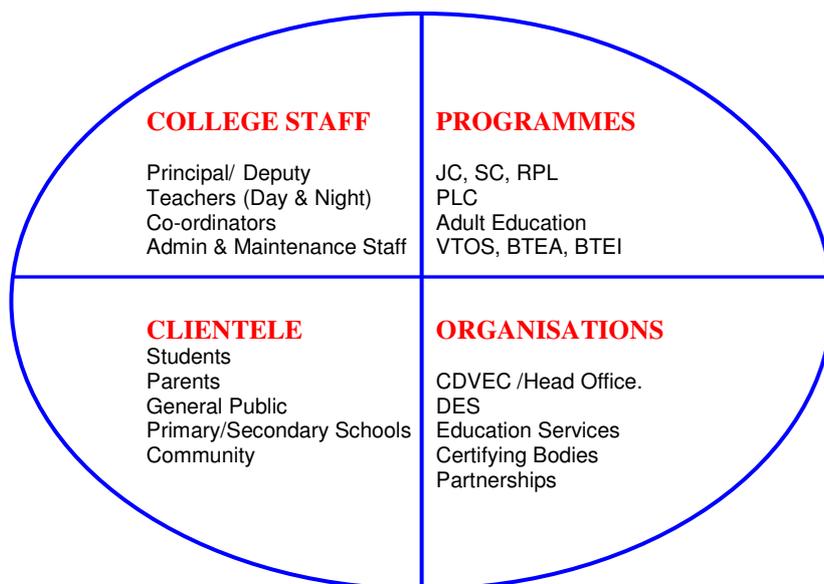
Fig. 1. 1 The Four Key areas of Responsibility for the School Secretary

1.1.1 First Key Area of Responsibility - College Staff

The staff of the college comprises of the principal, deputy principal, thirty-five teachers (PWT and Pro-Rata) in the day school to include three guidance counsellors, assistant principals, special duties post holders, special needs assistant, FETAC, VTOS and BTEI co-ordinators. In addition to the two-wholetime administrative staff members and one part-time person, there are seven permanent maintenance staff, a librarian and a canteen staff. The evening school is staffed by the Director of Adult Education who is a member of the wholetime academic staff, a special duties post holder and twenty part-time teachers. Fig. 1.10 (p.16) and Fig. 2.9 (p.23) gives an account of the administrative services provided by the 'school secretary' in the four key areas of responsibility.

1.1.2 Second Key Area of Responsibility – Programmes Offered

The college offers a very comprehensive and diverse range of programmes. It offers programmes of study at Junior Cycle (JC), Senior Cycle (SC), Repeat Leaving Certificate (RPL), Post-Leaving Certificate (PLC), VTOS and BTEI programmes. The college also has an evening school that offers professional courses in Accountancy and Management, Leaving Certificate subjects, Computer Studies, Hobby & Craft courses and Language courses.

1.1.3 Third Key Area of Responsibility – School Clientele

The third key area of responsibility of the researcher is to the clientele of the college which includes the students, parents, general public and the community. The wholetime enrolment (2009) was five hundred and twenty six students, together with an additional one hundred and ten students enrolled under the Back to Education (BTEI) programme and four hundred and two students in the evening school. Fig 1.2 depicts an overview of the

number of staff and students to whom an administrative support service is provided.

An Overview of the Administrative Support provided by School Secretary			
Academic	Admin/ Maintenance	Students	Total
Day Academic Staff 35 Special Needs Assistant 01 Adult Ed 20	Admin 2.5 Maintenance 07 Librarian 01	Day Students 526 Back to Education 110 Adult Education 402	Staff 66.5 Students 1038
Total 56	**Total 10.5**	**Total 1038**	**Total 1104.5**

Fig. 1.2 An overview of the administrative support provided by the School Secretary to staff and students

As an administrative staff member of CDVEC and 'school secretary' of the college the researcher is responsible for the return of work to various departments in CDVEC to include the Education section, Human Resources, Finance, Management Services and Grants. She also returns work on behalf of the Principal to the Buildings Section of CDVEC. Fig. 1.7 (p.13) illustrates the departments in CDVEC that work is returned to.

1.1.4   Fourth Key Area of Responsibility – Organisations

The role of the school secretary involves dealing with many organisations and departments alongside that of CDVEC. These include the Department of Education and Skills (DES) in relation to State Examinations Commission and the Database Section for the October Returns that provides details of all wholetime students enrolled at 30th September of each academic year. The certifying bodies in relation to the certification of Post

Leaving Certificate (PLC) or Further Education courses in the college.   The main certifying bodies that the researcher liases with are Further Education and Training Council (FETAC), International Therapy Education Council (ITEC) and Accounting Technician Ireland (ATI) who are the certifying bodies for the PLC courses in her college. The researcher also liases with the college designated Disability Officer in the National Learning Network (NLN) in respect of passing on information and invoices for materials purchased. The researcher also returns information on behalf of the Principal and Guidance Counsellor to the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) in relation to resource hours and reasonable accommodation at exam time for students.

1.2. The Research Topic – A Study of the Role and Impact of the School Secretary in the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee (CDVEC)

There were three main reasons for completing this study

1) To achieve greater recognition for the role
2) To add new knowledge and improve understanding of the role of the secretary among education stakeholders
3) To respond to the recommendations carried in the Rochford Review (2002)

1.2.1   Greater Recognition for the Role

The first reason for undertaking this research was to highlight the researcher's on-going philosophical assumptions and perceptions of the important role school secretaries' play in the education system and the extent of the professional service they provide. Throughout the study it was important to discover the views of the stakeholders.   The researcher is

convinced that a root and branch review of the role is needed to ensure it meets the needs of the stakeholders in a dramatically changing context. These changes are depicted in Fig. 1.3 and will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2 of this study. They include:

1) An increase and change in the nature of the workload undertaken

2) An increase in legislation and policy documents

3) Change in the profile of students and curriculum

4) Changes in Information Technology

5) Changes in the structure at CDVEC Head Office

6) Changes in the role of the VEC as an educational provider

An Overview of the Changes, Responsibilities and Increasing Workload   of the School Secretary

School Secretary		
1990-2000 Key Changes	**2000 -2010 Key Changes**	**2010-2020 Forecast of Key Changes**
Exit from Recession 1980s Further Development of PLC, courses & introduction of LCA & LCVP Courses CDVEC & DIT become separate entities (1992) Celtic Tiger Decline in Applications Information Technology (Student & Timetable Databases) Enlargement of EU – Increase in EU and International Student Applications Education Act 1998	Education Welfare Act 2000 Vocational Amendment Act (2001) Rochford Review (2002) IT Electronic Mail Financial, Purchasing & HR Databases, FETAC Certification Database New Education Welfare Board The Education for Persons with Disability (EPSEN) Act 2004 Disability Act 2005 Increase in Policy Documents Reporting & Accountability National Qualification Framework (NQF) Recession 2008 Increase in Enrolments	Significant downturn in Economy Public Service Moratorium McCarthy Report – on Re-structuring in Public Service IVEA (2008) Forecast 85.000 people will up-skill by 2020 NQF Increase in Number of Students to Levels 5/6. Need to increase supply at levels 7/8 Smart Economy Knowledge Economy Forecasts of needs in Science Mathematics Information Technology

Fig .1.3 depicts the changes as experienced by the researcher from (1990-2010)

1.2.2 Constructing New Knowledge

The second reason for undertaking this research came to light when the researcher was carrying out research for the Masters in Education and Training Management, where she found that there was a lack of literature on administration in education other than that which referred to the school principal or deputy. She interpreted a lot of the literature on education administration as depicting many of the functions she herself performed but where there was never any reference to 'school secretaries' or administrative personnel working in education. For this reason she set out to explore the literature further. Casanova (1991, p. 14) reported that her study in the US on 'elementary school secretaries' and the work they do was made difficult by the dearth of literature available.

One school principal (CDVEC) interviewed by the researcher while carrying out research for an MSc dissertation (Connolly O'Prey 2002,p.99) described the role of the school secretary as follows:

> *"The job of the school secretary like a principal's job has been transformed from what it was in the 1970's. It bears no relation to what it is today. If the job of the principal has changed so has the job of the admin person. The school secretary is a historical term. There has only ever been one. In some schools they have not had one at all. CDVEC has been fortunate that at least every school has one. The person has to be an all rounder. Some people are excellent with the public and lousy with accounts. They have to be able to juggle multiple tasks all the time, while at the same time ensuring the correct and accurate implementation of the relevant procedures. The administrative staff are professional administrators".*

The researcher would agree that the above description describes how the role of the school secretary has changed significantly in the last decade. It also describes the skills required to perform the role effectively to meet the requirements of all stakeholders in CDVEC.

1.2.3 Responding to The Rochford Review (2002)

The third motivation for completing the study was in response to the Rochford Review (2002) that involved a study of the administrative staffing structures at CDVEC. The review was commissioned by the Department of Education and Science, the Trade Union IMPACT and CDVEC to investigate the appropriate structures at CDVEC for administrative grades. The Review was carried out by an independent consultant Mr. Dermot Rochford.

The commissioning of this report was the result of a dispute between CDVEC administrative staff and their trade union IMPACT. The dispute centred around the exclusion of CDVEC administrative staff in competing for administrative posts under new structures in the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT). It had originally been agreed that the first filling of administrative posts under the new structures in DIT, would be filled by confined competition of staff in CDVEC and DIT. Following the dispute IMPACT agreed to have an independent consultant investigate the administrative structures at CDVEC.

The Rochford Review (2002) report found that CDVEC and DIT were reasonably similar in terms of operational size, but that DIT enjoyed a significantly greater level of administrative and management resources in supplying the delivery of its services. The report recommended for CDVEC an increase in the present allocation of administrative posts from one hundred and eight to a base of one hundred and forty two posts, with a possible extension to one hundred and fifty eight posts. The report also indicated how CDVEC for the future would be significantly affected by implementing legislation and new work programmes. The effects of this would be increased work pressure and operational complexity, which administrative staff would have to cope with.

The Rochford Review (2002) indicated that the administrative area in CDVEC was under resourced, under skilled and had a disproportionately less attractive career and supervisory/specialist structure than which applied in DIT. The structures were inadequate to cope with the existing pressures faced by the organisation today. He highlighted the need for a proactive human resource strategy to be implemented in order to cope with a large and complex workforce. The ideal staff structure should also incorporate a new specialist section dealing with staff welfare and development to include induction training, staff development and employee assistance (Connolly O'Prey, 2002, pp. 36-37).

The methodology used for the Rochford Review (2002) was a quantitative one where the administrative structures in the schools and colleges in CDVEC were based on the enrolments of 2000. No allowance was included for schools that had a night school in operation. The findings from this study identified that ninety-six per cent of posts higher than Grade IV positions were being allocated to the administrative structures at CDVEC Head Office, three per cent in the larger schools and one per cent at the youth services section of CDVEC. At this time it was decided to carry out an independent study in the schools and colleges. Now eight years later this study has yet to be completed despite the many changes, challenges and opportunities that schools and colleges in the VEC sector are facing in the new millennium.

1.3 City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee (CDVEC)

CDVEC was established under the Vocational Education Act of 1930. Its purpose is to develop, provide and support high quality person centred learning opportunities for young people and adults in Dublin City (CDVEC

Staff Handbook, 2007, p.7). While spatially its administrative area is limited by the city boundary, its ambit extends nationally. It delivers a broad range of educational courses and provides a wide variety of complementary and supplementary services, to over twelve thousand full-time students and seventeen thousand five hundred part-time adult students. It employs over four thousand staff and its annual expenditure of one hundred and sixty million (2005) indicates the extent of its activities (p.5) fig. 1.4 illustrates a number of the services provided by CDVEC.

Overview of the Services Provided by CDVEC & Student and Staff Cohort (2005)		
CDVEC		
Services	Students	Staff
Second Level & Further Education Courses Adult Education Educational Innovation Programmes for Young People Workplace Education Support Services Student Information	12,000 Full Time 17,500 Part-Time	4,000 Staff

Fig. 1.4 an overview of the services provided by CDVEC and Staff and student cohort (2005)

CDVEC is a statutory committee comprised of thirteen elected members drawn from political representatives, nine staff representatives and two parent representatives. A further four members are selected and appointed from a number of specified groups by Dublin City Council following consultation with the thirteen elected members of CDVEC.

The day-to-day educational, management and administrative functions are the responsibility of the Chief Executive Officer supported by Education

Officers, Heads of Administration, Principals and Heads of Centres. Fig. 1.5 illustrates the Functional Organisation and Management Structure as illustrated in the CDVEC (2007) staff handbook.

CDVEC MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

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┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│              Committee               │
└─────────────────────────────────────┘
                   │
┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│                 CEO                  │
└─────────────────────────────────────┘
           │                  │
┌────────────────────┐  ┌────────────────────────┐
│ Head of Administration │ │   Education Officers   │
├────────────────────┤  ├────────────────────────┤
│  Management Services  │ │       Principals       │
├────────────────────┤  ├────────────────────────┤
│   Human Resources    │ │    Heads of Centres    │
├────────────────────┤  ├────────────────────────┤
│       Finance        │ │ Adult Education Officers │
├────────────────────┤  └────────────────────────┘
│ Head of Internal Audit │
└────────────────────┘
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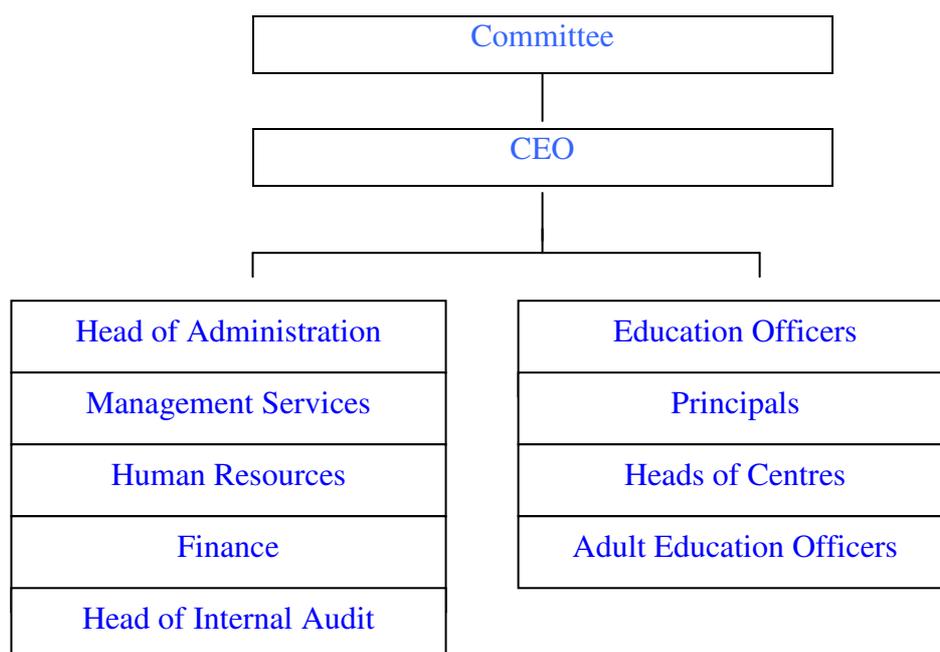
*Fig 1.5 Functional Organisation and Management Structure
of CDVEC Staff Handbook (2007)*

In addition to its twenty-two schools and colleges, CDVEC operates ten Youthreach centres, one hundred Out Centres, including Traveller Education Centres, and provides a comprehensive education service in Dublin's seven prisons. The Psychological Service and Curriculum Development Unit provide specialist support, as does the City of Dublin Youth Service Board. This diversity of service attests to how effectively CDVEC has evolved and grown to meet the constantly changing needs of communities, schools and learners in Dublin City. Fig. 1.6 illustrates the centres that CDVEC provides an education service.

City of Dublin VEC Colleges and other Centres			
CDVEC			
22 Schools/Colleges	10 Youthreach Centres 100 Out Centres Traveller Ed Centre Prison Service	Psychological Services	Youth Services Boards

Fig. 1.6 Centres where CDVEC Provides an Education Service

The school secretary working in the schools and colleges of CDVEC returns work to the functional departments in CDVEC as depicted in Fig. 1.7

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                    Education

                 Human Resources

                     Finance

  Banking | Payroll | Purchasing | Creditors | Projects

               Management Services

                     Grants

                    Buildings
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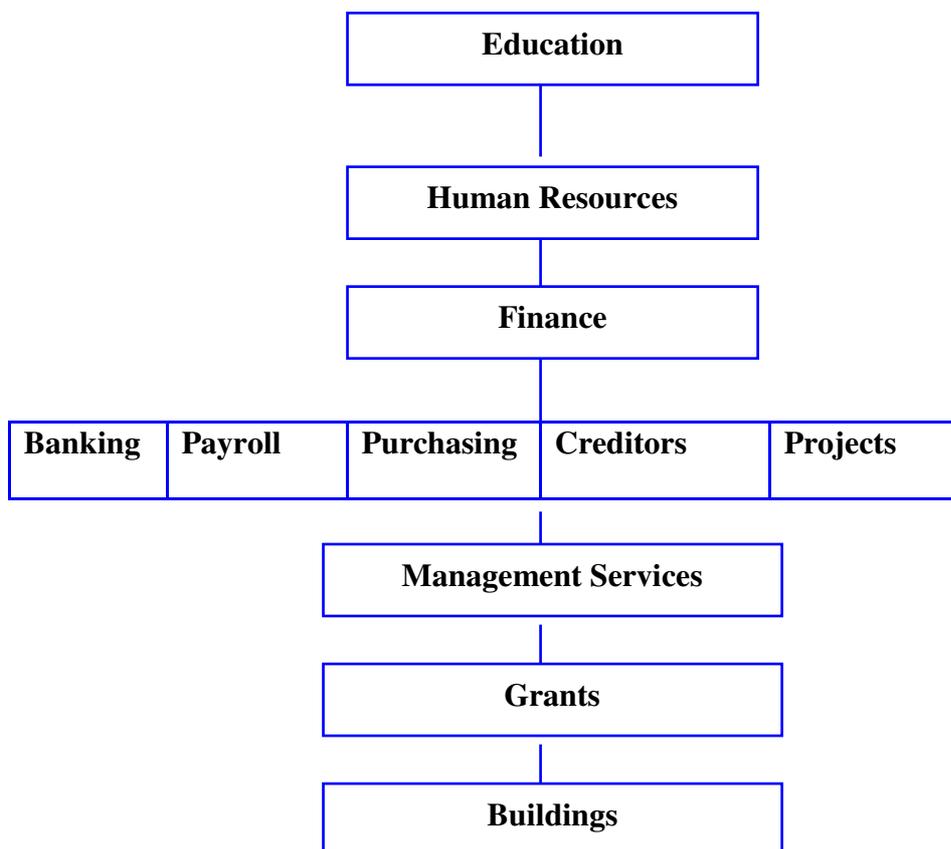
*Fig. 1.7 The Functional Departments in CDVEC Head Office that work
is returned to by the 'school secretary'*

1.4 Role of School Secretary

The 'school secretary' is appointed as an administrative staff member by CDVEC to provide an administrative service in the schools and colleges as directed by the principal. This assists in the smooth running of the school that in turn assists CDVEC in reaching their overall mission. The findings from the pilot study carried out by the researcher on the role and impact of the 'school secretary' in (2008) highlighted the need for the 'school secretary' to understand the overall mission statement of CDVEC and what it is trying to achieve. The overall purpose of CDVEC is described in the staff Handbook (2007, p. 7). The findings from the pilot study also highlighted the need to understand the mission statement of the college and what it is striving for and how it relates to the overall mission of CDVEC. Fig. 1.8

Mission of CDVEC and School	
Organisational Level	School Level
To Develop, Provide and Support High Quality Person Centred Learning Opportunities For Young People And Adults In Dublin City.	*To Provide An Atmosphere, Which Is Encouraging And Supportive For Students And Which Will Help Them Achieve Their Goals.*
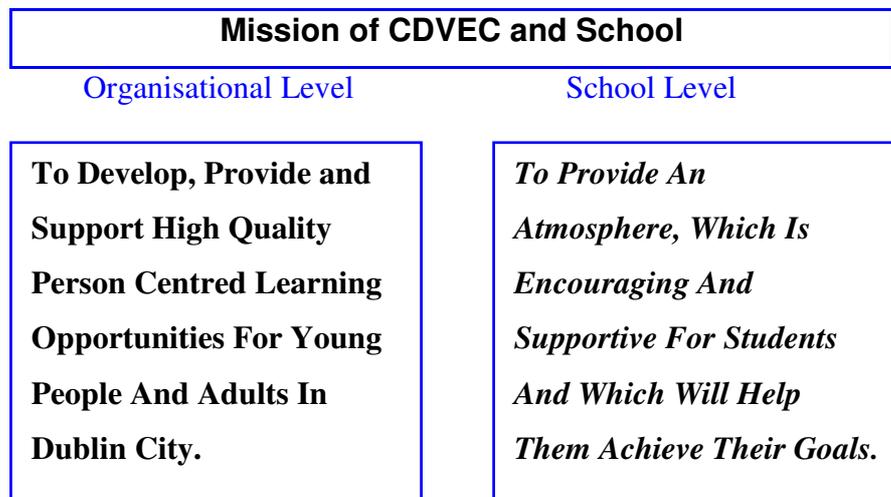
Fig. 1.8   The School Secretary needs to understand the purpose or mission of the overall organisation and the mission of the school

1.4.1   Key Knowledge Requirements

In order to provide a well functioning administrative service the school secretary requires an in-depth knowledge of CDVEC procedures that are in operation in the school to include, policies, circulars, systems, rules and regulations, forms and personnel of the education bodies and agencies with whom the school secretary interacts. Fig. 1.9 illustrates the knowledge sets required by the school secretary.

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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│        Knowledge Sets required by School Secretary            │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
            ┌─────────────────────────────────┐
            │        School Secretary          │
            └─────────────────────────────────┘
     ┌──────────────────────────┐      ┌──────────────────────────┐
     │ Procedures, Policies,     │      │ Role and Functions of the │
     │ Circulars, Systems, Rules,│      │ Personnel of Education     │
     │ Regulations, Documentation│      │ Bodies and other Agencies  │
     └──────────────────────────┘      └──────────────────────────┘
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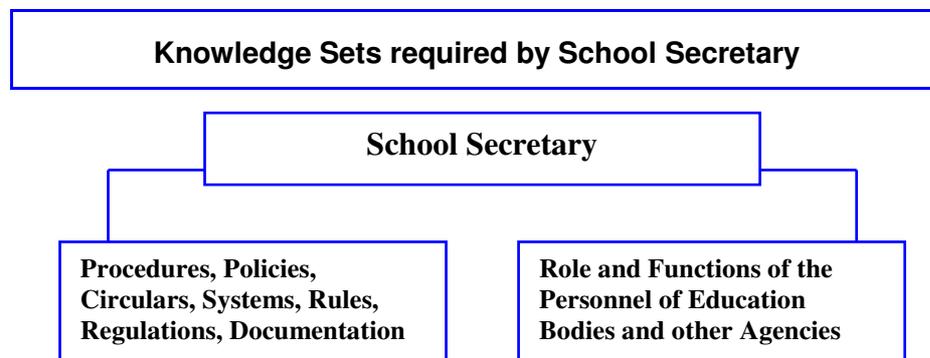
Fig. 1.9 Knowledge sets required by 'school secretary'

1.4.2   Cyclical nature of the work of School Secretary

There is also a need to understand that the administrative functions in a school or college are cyclical and the knowledge to understand the necessity of when each function should commence. There are three terms in the academic year. Fig 1.10 illustrates the work carried out by the 'school secretary' to include a fourth term which they are required to work.

**Cyclical Work Carried Out by the School Secretary
Over A Four Term School Year**

Term 1 Sept – Dec	Term 2 Jan- March	Term 3 April - May	Term 4 June -August
Enrolments (Day & Evening), Students commence/ re-commence. Fees, Teacher Contracts, & Timetables, Production of Class Lists, Junior Cert Results September/October Returns for Teachers and Students First Year Enrolments for next academic year Reconciliation of Fees First Board of Mgt. Meeting, Christmas Exams/Reports On-going part-time teacher returns for payment Terms 1-3. Attendance reports for all staff and wages reports for maintenance staff (terms 1-4) and Financial Accounts (terms 1-4)	Evening School Enrolments Parent Teacher/ Student Teacher Meetings 2nd Board of Management Meeting Production of New Brochure & Advertising Materials College OPEN Day Marketing Campaign for the Next Academic Year Admissions Easter Mock Exams	On-Going Admissions Student Interviews FETAC /ITEC Student Examinations External Examiners State Exams/ Practical Examinations/Oral Exams 3rd Board of Management Meeting In-House Graduation & Production of Certificates End of Term Arrangements Preparation for State Examinations	State Examinations Junior/Leaving Certificate Principal/Deputy & Administrative Staff work closely on Letters of offer to PLC/Adult Students Letters to Junior and Senior Students re. commencement of new term On-going admissions enquiries & evening school enquiries Preparation for return of teachers their folders of information New Teacher appointments Leaving Cert results Repeat Leaving Certificate Enrolments Preparation for New Term

*Fig. 1.10 Cyclical work carried out by the school secretary
over a four- term school year*

1.4.3   Relationship between school principal and secretary

The role of the school secretary involves working closely with the school

principal. It requires an appreciation of the essential confidential nature of

the role. It also requires an understanding of the leadership role of the principal and the need to understand priorities as required. The role also involves discussions and directions as required for working on the various tasks as outlined above. It can vary from the management of routine correspondence to more complicated financial or IT matters. It can relate to the processing of teacher contracts, admissions procedures, and health and safety matters or on Board of Management Meetings or returns to the DES. It can include arranging appointments with students, parents or dealing with enquiries from the general public.

1.4.4 The school secretary and the stakeholders

The school secretary requires an understanding of the needs of all stakeholders with whom he/she interacts with during the course of their work. In order to provide an administrative service to students in terms of letters, forms, course content, interviews and arranging meetings.

In respect of teachers and maintenance staff it includes the payment of salaries and wages, the ordering of materials to carry out their role in the classroom and for maintenance the cleaning and up-keep of the college. It also requires the maintenance and upkeep of student records both manually and electronically. Fig 1.11 illustrates the stakeholders as discussed above that the 'school secretary' interacts with.

School Secretary and Stakeholders in CDVEC
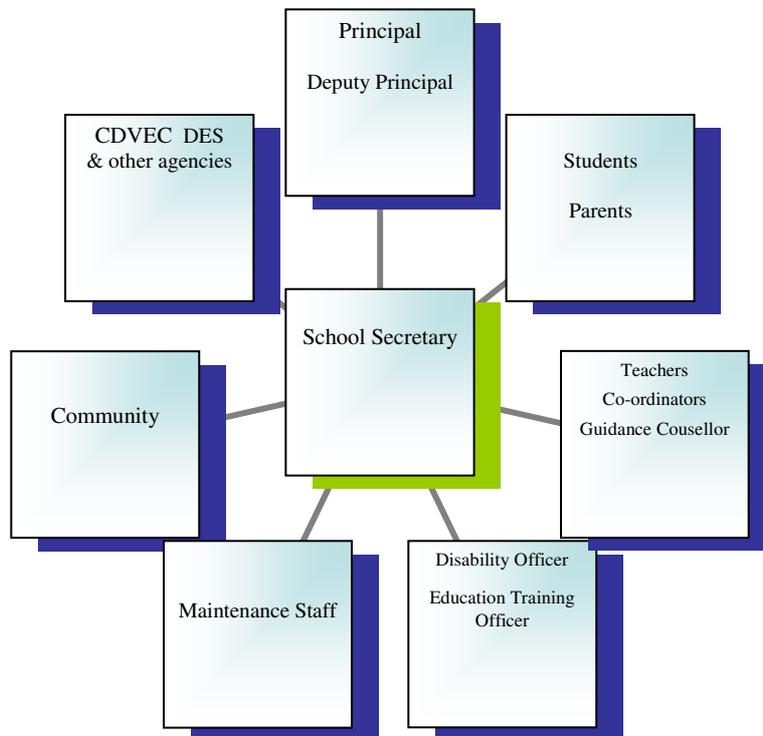
Fig. 1. 11 Stakeholders that interact with 'school secretary'

1.5 Outline of the Research Study

This chapter introduced the researcher and provided a detailed profile of her career to date and her commitment to lifelong learning. A detailed account of the role and knowledge required by the 'school secretary' and how it feeds back to the structures in CDVEC Head Office was provided. She described changes that had taken place that impacted on the role in terms of information technology, legislation, curriculum and student population. Finally she explained the CDVEC organisation and outlined its purpose, structure and the services it provides.

Chapter two deals with the context of the study and how the VEC sector evolved. It considers the societal influences that have influenced its

development. It discusses the social partnership industrial relations model in place between the 1980s and 2000. It traces a twenty- year period of course development designed to meet the growing demands of industry and the private sector. It looks at the impact of this development both at CDVEC organisational level and school level. It outlines the changes in curriculum and its impact on the role of the school secretary. It discusses the difficulty of recruitment in the public sector and the reduction of administrative personnel in schools and colleges.

The final section of chapter 2 discusses the 1998 Education Act and the Vocational Amendment (2001) Act and the acts that followed and their impact in schools and colleges and on the school secretary. The impact of the Rochford Review (2002) is discussed in detail. This chapter looks at the many new initiatives introduced into the education system with a view to student retention and increase in numeracy and literacy levels for students. The final section of this chapter discusses the cyclical nature of recessions from 1980s to 2008 and the effects in CDVEC.

Chapter 3 covers the literature review. It explores the history of the role of vocational education, CDVEC and school secretary. It examines models of best practice in education administration and professional development. It analyses the literature available on the role of the school secretary and the many facets of the role. It considers the literature on the changing role of the leader in education and the many changes that have taken place since the introduction of the 1998 Education Act and the 2001 Vocational Amendment Act.

Chapter 4 deals with the research methodology. It describes the researchers worldview and the reasons for using a qualitative methodology. It discusses in detail the methodology and design of the research.

Chapter 5 deals with the Research Analysis. The use of in-depth interviews, surveys and documentation analysis provides a range of interesting and valuable insights and rich material from which to clarify findings and draw conclusion.

Chapter 6 identifies the key findings and prioritises them in respect of a number of key areas for improvements.

Chapter 7 draws conclusions and issues recommendations on improving the role of the school secretary.

Chapter 2

Context

'An Exploration of the Role of the School Secretary/Administrator in the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee' (CDVEC)

Introduction

This chapter explores the following as they impact directly on the role of the 'school secretary' working in the schools and colleges of the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee (CDVEC).

1) The Irish Education System
2) The Vocational Education Sector
3) Changes in the Vocational Education Sector
4) The City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee (CDVEC)
5) The Role of the School Secretary
6) Complexities of the Role of School Secretary
7) The effects of the Rochford Review (2002)
8) Societal and Economic Influences

The first section of this chapter outlines the Irish education system, it traces the early development of vocational education and the role of CDVEC since the enactment of the 1930 Vocational Education Act and finally it looks at what role the 'school secretary' plays in this development.

2.1 Irish Education System

The Department of Education and Skills (DES) sets the general regulations for recognition of schools. It prescribes and controls the national curriculum and the public examination system, and establishes rules and regulations for the management, resourcing and staffing of schools. The DES is responsible for and controls the budgetary functions and teacher salary scales (OECD, 2008). The DES provides funding to all three levels of education in Ireland. The first level (primary) and the second level (secondary) is provided directly to the school. For third level (post secondary including community and technical colleges and universities) it is channelled through the Higher Education Authority (HEA). In CDVEC the day-to-day educational, management and administrative functions are the responsibility of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO). Fig. 2.1 depicts the position of CDVEC in the Irish education sector.

DES

CDVEC

Schools and Colleges
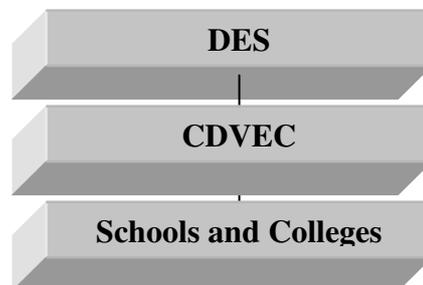
Fig. 2.1 Position of CDVEC in the Irish Education Sector

The principal of the school is responsible for the day- to day operation of the school. The work of the 'school secretary' is directed by the principal and by functional management in CDVEC Head Office. In order to depict the work of a 'school secretary' in one of CDVEC schools and colleges the researcher has chosen her own school that reflects similar situations in many

of the twenty-two schools and colleges in CDVEC. Fig. 2.2. illustrates the
organisation chart in the college where the researcher works.

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                          ┌─────────────────┐
                          │   Principal     │
                          └─────────────────┘
                          ┌─────────────────┐
                          │ Deputy Principal │
                          └─────────────────┘

   ┌──────────────┐    ┌──────────────┐    ┌──────────────┐
   │ Administrative│    │   Academic   │    │  Maintenance │
   │    Staff      │    │    Staff     │    │     Staff    │
   └──────────────┘    └──────────────┘    └──────────────┘

   Grade IV          Assistant Principals      Senior Porter
   Grade 111         Special Duties Posts       Assistant Porter
   Temp. 111         Career Guidance            General
                     Director of Adult Ed       Operatives
                     Programme (Night           Groundsman
                     School)
                     Co-ordinators/Tutors
                     Teachers (PWT, Pro-rata,
                     Part-Time), Special
                     Needs/Assistant
```

Fig. 2.2 College Organisation Chart

The work of the 'school secretary' has changed greatly over the last decade.
This includes work in the school that directly relates to the principal in
terms of his/her work with the overall running of the school/college. The
current role of the principal has brought with it an overwhelming increase in
responsibility and accountability. There has also been a huge increase in the
demands in schools and colleges from an economical and educational point
of view to meet the changes in course and curriculum provision, student and
employer needs. All of these factors have impacted greatly on the role of the
'school secretary' who is responsible for ensuring the smooth running of the
school office and meeting the needs of all stakeholders fig. 1.11 (p.19).

2.1.1   Vocational Education Section

The Irish Vocational Education sector has grown extensively and responded to both the educational and training demands placed on them by the State since its inception in 1930. To realise the extent of its growth Trant (2007) and Cooke (2009) have traced its history. They describe how the 1930 Vocational Education Act introduced an alternative type of education to the secondary education system already in place and how a new era of technical education based on Continuation education began. They inform us of how the lack of Continuation education had created a great gap in the education system and how the 1930 Act was significant in that it widened the scope of technical education and expanded the school system to offer general and practical training in preparation for employment. Technical education meant education pertaining to trades, manufactures, commerce, and other industrial pursuits including the occupations of girls and women connected with the household and subjects relating to these areas to include Science, Art and Physical Education. Today this is extended to include the development of courses and training to allow students continue in their areas of study at third level. This thriving vocational education sector, as it is known today owes much to the men and women whose contributions and deeds are rightly chronicled in Cooke (2009). Included in these men and women are the administrative staff of CDVEC who have been traced in the minutes of the monthly committee meetings where reference was made to their being as providing a clerical/secretarial service in the schools and colleges of CDVEC since 1930.

2.1.2   Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA)

The Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA) is an association that represents the interests, at national level, of Ireland's thirty-three Vocational Education Committees (VEC's). Established in 1902 as the Irish Technical Education Association changed its name to (IVEA) in 1944. As a

representative body, it has a diverse range of functions which at all times seek to protect, promote and enhance the interests of vocational education and training within the wider education sector and the country at large (IVEA, 2008, p.1).

The IVEA (2008) report on 'A New Age of Challenge and Opportunity for VEC's' discusses the confluence of developments that are taking place in the Vocational Education sector. They estimate that eighty four per cent of the up-skilling prescribed in the national skills strategy of some 500,000 people by the year 2020, will lie within the VEC remit. The report makes no reference to the impact of these changes on the role of the 'school secretary' in the last decade or the likelihood of the impact it will have on them in the next decade to 2020. The IVEA has provided induction training to the administrative staff of CDVEC. The researcher has first hand experience of this in 1982 when she commenced her career in CDVEC.

2.1.3   Changes in VEC Structure and Legislation

The latter years of the last century saw major changes in the Vocational education sector to begin with the 1998 Education Act followed by a new legislative framework for VECs that proved to be the most significant piece of legislation since the enactment of the VEC's own founding legislation in 1930. The turn of the new millennium commencing with the Vocational Education (Amendment) Act 2001 herald a new era of significant development and change of direction for VEC's. Fig. 2.3 traces the legislation that has come into force since the enactment of the 1998 Education Act to the year 2005.

Year	Act
1998	The Education Act
1999	The Primary School Curriculum
2000	The Education Welfare Act 2000
2001 (1991)	The Children's Act
2001	The Vocational Amendment Act
2001	The Teaching Council Act
2002	The Ombudsman for Children Act
2004	The Education for Persons with Special Needs (EPSEN) Act
2004	The Equality Act
2005	The Disability Act

Fig. 2.3 Education Legislation that has come into force since the passing of the 1998 Education Act to the year 2005

The 'school secretary' has first hand knowledge of the demands made on principals by this new legislation in terms of the needs for new policy documents and the amount of paperwork involved. This requires additional word processing of documents, implementation of filing systems both electronically and manually that allows for the fast retrieval of information as required.

2.1.4   City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee (CDVEC)

The 'school secretary' plays a significant role in CDVEC schools and colleges in supporting the mission of CDVEC. In supporting this mission they have been faced with many challenges and opportunities in their normal course of work. The increase in education legislation on schools and colleges has placed significant changes and demands on school principals and senior academic staff in schools and colleges that in turn has increased the workload for the 'school secretary'.

The increase in financial legislation and public service regulation has led to an increase in accountability and responsibility for the financial elements of the role of the 'school secretary'. Calls for better practice in Public Service (OECD, 2008) and from many sectors of the community has led to an awareness of public service demands. School secretaries are the first point of contact in schools and colleges and the public demand that they are fully equipped with the knowledge to answer and pass on the numerous enquiries that come their way every day.

The 'school secretary' has also experienced many new and exciting opportunities in the schools and colleges in CDVEC in terms of course development, new student initiatives, extra curricular activities through their Sports and Cultural Council (SCC). All of these developments bear witness to the success of the CDVEC in developing programmes of education to meet the needs of the citizens of Dublin city from all walks of life. The 'school secretary' has shared in the experiences of students attending the schools and colleges from many different parts of the world seeking an education. One school secretary interviewed in the pilot study in (2008) commented on how she would not like to work elsewhere because there was 'life in a school'.

2.1.5   The Purpose of CDVEC

The purpose of CDVEC is to develop, to provide, and to support high quality person centred learning opportunities for young people and adults in Dublin City. CDVEC believes that every person has a right to education and learning opportunities that is in a flexible and responsive learning style. They see education as a key response to addressing social inclusion and that communities should be consulted in the development and delivery of the education service. They hold the belief that equality and fairness must inform their policies and actions and their staff are the most important

resource in providing this high quality service (CDVEC Staff Handbook, 2007, p. 7).

2.1.6   Challenges for the Future

The CDVEC outlines how they will cope with the challenges they face in delivering their services by promoting a 'shared vision' and corporate identity based on a commitment to provide a high quality education service, particularly to those most in need and to ensure that this vision and value base is known and understood by their staff, learners and stakeholders. CDVEC will seek to co-ordinate their educational services in order to meet the needs of their learners in a more efficient manner and encourage and accommodate educational innovation and development. A pilot study carried out by the researcher in 2008 highlighted the need for a more inclusive form of collaboration and communication for 'school secretaries' working in the schools and colleges of CDVEC. It also highlighted the need for more professional development and training to meet the challenges they were currently facing.

2.1.7   Research Development Initiatives

The CDVEC will seek to undertake and support research and development initiatives to assist the development of policy and practice and develop effective consultation processes with staff, learners and stakeholders. It will seek to support the professional development of their staff and inform and influence the development of national education policy and practice. This will include engaging with other organisations in co-ordinating educational services that address educational disadvantaged, access and social inclusion. They will seek to improve accountability and responsibility at all levels within the organisation and obtain the resources necessary to achieve the delivery of their educational services and use their resources in an efficient and effective manner (CDVEC, Staff Handbook, 2007, p. 8).

2.2 Role of the School Secretary

School secretaries play a pivotal role in assisting the delivery of education services to all stakeholder in the schools and colleges of CDVEC. The pilot study (2008) highlighted how they see the key stakeholder involved as the student. Other stakeholders include; principals/deputies, parents, teachers, the community, employers, social welfare offices, partnerships, primary and secondary schools.

The staff handbook (2007, p. 7) states that CDVEC will place the learner at the centre of the educational process. They will develop and deliver educational services to meet the emerging needs of specific groups or communities in the city and they will manage and deliver their services in an open, honest and transparent manner. They will work in partnership with other statutory and voluntary bodies and community groups, to maximise educational opportunities available in the city.

2.2.1 Changes in Course Development and Curriculum

The 1980s commenced a new era of change in course and curriculum developments in the VEC sector. Changes in this area resulted in many changes in the working practices of 'school secretaries' working in vocational schools and colleges. These changes included the involvement in the production of course materials, marketing, admissions, fee receipting and reconciliation, certification and IT processes. This type of administration process was a new departure from the administration processes involved with the traditional programmes of administration in the vocational schools for the Group Certificate, Intermediate Certificate and Leaving Certificate and Repeat Leaving Certificate programmes. It required the 'school secretary' as first point of contact to have up-to-date information on all of the programmes offered and the ability to refer students and

enquiries on to the various co-ordinators and guidance counsellors for more detailed information. Fig. 2.4 illustrates the new programmes of learning offered in CDVEC schools and colleges from the 1980s into the new millennium.

Year	Course	Description
1985	PLC	Post Leaving Certificate Courses were introduced in 1985.
1987	VTOS	Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme for the unemployed
1994	LCVP	Leaving Certificate Vocational Preparation Programme (A variation of the Leaving Certificate)
1995	LCA	Leaving Certificate Applied (a different type of Leaving Cert programme)
2001	JCSP	New Junior Certificate Schools Programme
2005	DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
2006	BTEI	Back to Education Initiative For those who did not complete second level education previously

Fig. 2.4 New Programmes of Learning offered in CDVEC Schools
& Colleges from the 1980s into the new millennium

2.2.2   Effects of the Celtic Tiger Era

An unprecedented growth in the Irish economy in the mid 1990s became known as the 'celtic tiger' era.   Following the recession of the late 1980s, the period 1991-1993 produced little that was spectacular in terms of economic growth, with high unemployment and high interest rates associated with the exchange rate crises that hit the European Union countries in 1992/1993. In 1994 there was suddenly a dramatic change that Murphy (2000, p. 6) refers to as a new economic configuration that saw a

predominantly pre-industrial economy '*leap-froged*' so abruptly to a post-industrial high-tech economy.

Murphy (2000) outlines the sustained growth in gross national product (GNP) that averaged 7.5% in the six years period 1994 to 1999 with an average of gross domestic product (GDP) rate of 8.4%, a growth that saw employment grow by over 390,000, where the public sector deficit moved into a substantial surplus, where the national debt/GNP ratio was below sixty per cent which was half what it had been in 1987. Gross domestic demand was strong which ran through all forms of expenditure ranging from new car sales to the construction industry and purchases of new homes.

The effects of the 'celtic tiger' era in the vocational education sector saw a decline in the demand for various courses and programmes developed over the previous twenty years to cater for the demands in education from both an economical and educational point of view. Trant (2007) describes how the Leaving Certificate programme that was introduced in the 1960s brought VECs in line with their second level counterparts the secondary schools. The turn of the new millennium saw a decline in the number of students repeating their Leaving Certificate for which dedicated Repeat Leaving Certificate centres were set up in CDVEC that enjoyed increased growth in the 1970s and 1980s. The apparent reasons for this were twofold; firstly to take up employment for which there was now no scarcity or to attend third level programmes for which course fees had been abolished coupled with a lowering of points for many programmes of study.

The effects of the decrease in demand for courses in schools and colleges saw the development of new programmes of study to meet the changes in demand from a new clientele of students. The 'school secretary' was involved in major publicity campaigns. There was also a significant increase in evening school enrolments where students were prepared to work by day and study by night. Employers were also prepared to support employees

financially to study and up-skill in the night schools of CDVEC. The newly developed VTOS programmes introduced during the mid 1980s to meet the demands of high unemployment were also affected by the 'boom' in the employment sector.

The new millennium also witnessed a steady decline in the demand for popular PLC courses in the computer science area that were at their peak in the mid to late 1990s. This decline was most noticeable with the younger generation of Irish students but was offset to some extent with adult students or international students wishing to learn and increase their knowledge in the IT area.

The introduction of electronic mail for 'school secretaries' brought about many changes in the application procedures for students applying both nationally and internationally to undertake courses. It also brought about many changes in other forms of electronic post to include requests for teaching hours, career guidance information, advertising and links with other agencies that schools and colleges are involved with. This was seen as a new era of Information Technology where the 'school secretary' forwarded the electronic mail to the appropriate members of staff. This era also involved the upgrading and development of student database and timetabling programmes.

Five years into the new millennium saw a period of some predictability in terms of student enrolment. Schools had once again adapted to the need for extensive advertising and marketing campaigns to promote and advertise their courses in order to retain their current levels of staffing and funding. This was not a period long lived however resulting from the serious economic crisis in the latter months of 2008. For longer serving members in CDVEC it put the recession of the 1980s in the pale. The effects of a huge increase in unemployment resulted in a massive upturn of students seeking to undertake all categories of courses.

2.2.3 Knowledge and Skill Required by School Secretaries

Circular Letter C/L F33/03 from the DES on the revised Staffing and Organisational Structures in CDVEC outlines the skills and qualities for the 'school secretary' to carry out their role as depicted in Fig. 2.5.

Knowledge	Competencies	Administration Skills
Supervisory Management Skills	Initiative	Ability to process work with a high level of attention to detail
Good knowledge of record keeping	Ability to interpret policy	Decision Making skills
Good Interpersonal skills	Communication	Highly Developed Secretarial Skills
Information and Communication Technologies	Ability to use new techniques and technologies as they arise	Update their knowledge develop and use new skills and or amend systems

Fig. 2.5 C/L. F33/03 knowledge and skill required by school secretaries

The circular states, "that all jobs demand a good knowledge and skill in the use of Information and Communication Technologies and appointees will be expected to use new techniques and technologies as they arise. Appointees are also expected to up-date their knowledge and skills and develop and use new skills or amended systems. The VEC may provide or may financially support training, as appropriate".

The 'school secretary' (normally the senior administrative grade) is responsible for the production of the October returns to the Department of Education and Science (DES). This involves inputting information on students to include many fields of information for the completion of the returns.

2.2.4   Complexity of the Role

The complexity of the role for 'school secretaries' lies in the diverse range of functions they perform in the schools and colleges, together with the reporting back of many administrative functions to the different functional departments of CDVEC Head office and the Department of Education and Skills.

The 'school secretary' is placed in a dilemma of who do they serve first? Do they serve their own college, the functional departments at CDVEC Head Office or the DES? The lack of professional development and training provided for them in order to cope with the diverse nature of their role and the level of skills and knowledge required is also a major source of concern for them.

The additional responsibility of many 'school secretaries' working on their own with a student population in the region of three hundred and twenty students and a teaching staff of forty and upwards is a great source of stress for them. This is also the case in schools and colleges with over five hundred students attending. These schools have evening classes and an allocation of between fifty and seventy teachers. They also have between two and three administrative staff allocated to carry out the administrative functions required in the college.

2.3 Societal and Economic Influences Impacting on Vocational Education System

One of the motivations for this study developed as a result of the many changes that were taking place in the vocational education sector over the last decade and which in turn impacted on the role of the 'school secretary'. A new more diverse population of students were applying for and

undertaking courses of study in CDVEC schools and colleges. CDVEC participates in the agreement for separated children seeking asylum. It provides an education service and education advice, referral and support service to unaccompanied minors living in the City of Dublin area. Services are offered in co-ordination with the Health Service Executive (HSE) team. Some of these services include: English Language and Literacy Assessments and advice on school placement and courses (CDVEC, 2007, p.92). The impact of this on the role of the 'school secretary' involved a new way of communicating to newcomer students and understanding their needs and culture for which no training was provided. It also resulted in a steady incline in the number of international students applying for the newly developed courses in English language skills specially developed to meet their language needs.

Other factors that impinged on the role of the 'school secretary' was the recession of the 1980s. It was a time of great industrial unrest and an embargo on recruitment was placed on the Public Sector that had once been a great source of employment for the Irish workforce.

2.3.1 Industrial Relations Climate in Ireland from the 1980s

A move from a traditional model of collective bargaining and national wage agreements of the late 1970s and early 1980s to a new form of social partnership agreements into the next decade had an indirect impact on the role of the 'school secretary'. A more significant impact was during the recession of the 1980s when a public service embargo on recruitment was in place that led to a reduction in the number of administrative personnel working in the schools and colleges of CDVEC. At this time administrative staff were transferred to other centres of CDVEC to include DIT (Dublin Institute of Technology) centres. To the present day these positions have never been filled despite the increase in workload and change in work

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practices that school secretaries have experienced. The continued economic growth experienced by 'school secretaries' right into the first years of the new millennium through to 2011 have added further responsibilities to the role of the secretary.

The new national partnership agreements provided modest increases in salaries in the public service. At the same time the private sector were experiencing rapid growth particularly in the services and construction area. Fig. 2.6 illustrates the National Wage Agreements and Social Partnerships Agreements ratified between 1979 and 2006.

Year	National Wage Agreements (NWA) and Social Partnership Agreements
1979	National Understanding for Economic and Social Development
1980	A Second National Wage Agreement that did not survive
1987	The Programme for National Recovery (PNR)
1990	Programme for Economic and Social Progress (PESP)
1994	Programme for Competitiveness and Work (PCW)
1997	Partnership 2000 'Inclusion, Employment and Competitiveness'
1999	Programme for Prosperity and Fairness
2003	Sustaining Progress – 2003-2005
2006	Towards 2016 – Ten Year Framework Social Partnership Agreement 2006-2015

Fig. 2.6   National Wage Agreements and Social Partnership Agreements ratified between 1979 and 2006

The new industrial relations model between the State Employers, Social Partners and Trade Unions saw Ireland emerge into the 'celtic tiger' era already discussed in this chapter. This was an era that bridged a period of severe unemployment in the late 1980s to almost full employment at the turn of a new millennium. It also posed new problems in the hiring and retaining of administrative staff in CDVEC where 'school secretaries' were

the first point of contact. It was a time when a number of administrative staff resigned to take up positions in the much higher paid private sector.

2.3.2 CDVEC Administrative Staff – Industrial Relations Climate

CDVEC has a long history of good working relationships with trade unions. They meet with the various groups of trade unions on a regular basis to include IMPACT who represent the administrative and maintenance staff of CDVEC. The Administrative Staff Association (ASA) is the in-house association that negotiates with IMPACT on behalf of the administrative staff of CDVEC. Until 1991 the administrative staff was represented by the Local Government Public Service Union (LGPSU). Fig. 2.7 illustrates the various groups of unions that CDVEC negotiates with on behalf of their staff.

Category of Staff	CDVEC Group	Trade Union
Administrative Staff	ASA	IMPACT (LGPSU) to 1991
Maintenance Staff	Group of Unions	IMPACT & Other Trade Unions
Academic Staff 2nd Level Teachers	TUI 2nd Level Branch	TUI
DIT Colleges (Up to 1992)	TUI Colleges Branch.	TUI

Fig. 2.7   Unions that CDVEC negotiates with on behalf of their Staff

From the 1980s to 2002 the administrative staff (ASA) were a highly organised group meeting with IMPACT trade union on a regular basis. In this era many important milestones occurred. The first was a restructuring of administrative grades in 1984 that saw the abolishment of the Grade 11 Clerk Typist and the introduction of a new Grade IV Assistant Staff Officer.

The new grading structure in CDVEC for administrative staff was from Grade 111 to Grade V11 level with two Principal Officer grades (PO) and two Assistant Principal Officer grades (APO).

Up to 1992 the six colleges of DIT were under the auspices of CDVEC. The Administrative Staff Association (ASA) were heavily involved in the negotiations with IMPACT who in turn negotiated on their behalf with CDVEC on the forthcoming legislation of the separation of CDVEC and DIT. Under this new legislation DIT was to receive its own autonomy and hence the separation of the six colleges of technology (now Institutes of Technology) with CDVEC. At the time administrative staff of CDVEC were offered the opportunity of moving to the new development of DIT or remaining with CDVEC. IMPACT negotiated an agreement between CDVEC and DIT management that the first fillings of the vacancies at the new structures of DIT would be by closed competition for existing administrative staff of CDVEC. The setting up of DIT in 1992 meant that the administrative staff were divided and represented individually by IMPACT.

2.3.3   The Rochford Review (2002)

A positive and optimistic outlook remained with the administrative staff in CDVEC after the separation of CDVEC and DIT. IMPACT had negotiated an agreement with CDVEC to carry out an independent study on the structures for CDVEC based on the structures of DIT. This later became a national study of the structures in place for the administrative staff in VECs and known as the Rochford Review (2002). The ASA and IMPACT met regularly and administrative staff provided detailed descriptions of their jobs. Fig. 2.8 illustrates the grades & staffing levels (October 2000).

Grade	Posts
PO	2
APO	2
GR. V11	2
GR VI	5
GR. V	10
GR. IV	21
Gr. 111	66
Total	**108**

Fig. 2.8 Grades & Staffing Levels of Administrative Staff of CDVEC at (2000)

By the time the Rochford Review (2002) report was completed 'school secretaries' in CDVEC were experiencing a significant increase in workload and changes in work practices mainly resulting from an increase in education and employment legislation. This saw huge increases in areas of accountability and responsibility being devolved to the schools and colleges to include the introduction and implementation of many new policy documents.

The administrative structures of (2000) employed one hundred and eight posts (ninety-eight permanent) of which thirty of these posts were dispersed around the twenty colleges (now twenty-two) of CDVEC. At the time 'school secretaries' felt the Rochford Review (2002) was their Messiah in the 'celtic tiger' era that had emerged. Fig. 2.9 describes the administration staff distribution by function and programme at October 2000 as illustrated in the Rochford Review (2002).

Function/Programme	Nos	Permanent
Core H.O. (Main Scheme)	41	41
Schools (Main Scheme)	30	30
ESF/Grants	06	03
Projects	10	07
Self Financing	21	17
	___	___
Additional Staff:	108	98
Self Financing	02	
Projects	02	

Fig. 2.9 Staff Distribution by Function and Programme at 2000 as illustrated in (Rochford Review 2002)

The Rochford Review (2002) found that ninety-six per cent of posts above that of Grade IV level were allocated to the administrative structures at CDVEC Head Office. The allocation for the administrative posts in schools and colleges went from thirty posts to forty-six posts and in CDVEC Head Office from forty- one posts to sixty -one posts.   Fig. 2.10 illustrates the new structures proposed in the Rochford Review (2002)

Grade	No. of Posts New Structure	Old Structure
PO	02	02
APO	06	02
GR. V11	10	02
GR. VI	10	05
GR. V	11	10
GR. IV	41	21
GR.111	64	66
Total	**144**	**108**

Fig. 2.10 New structures proposed in the Rochford Review (2002)

The quantitative study by Rochford (2002) on the re-structuring of administrative posts in CDVEC did not include in its statistics the enrolment of students undertaking programmes of study in the schools and colleges that had an evening school in operation. Fig. 2.11 illustrates the weighting criteria used for the Rochford Review (2002) based on wholetime student

enrolment in the schools and colleges at 2000 that produced the new administrative structures in CDVEC.

Weighted Enrolment Points Based on Student Enrolments	Post Allocation to Schools/Colleges
Up to 250 students	0.5 post
251-350	01 post
351-750	1-2 posts
751-1190	2-3 posts
1191 – 1650	3-4 posts
1651 – 2130	4-5 posts
2131- 2630	5-6 posts
2631-3150	6-7 posts
3151 +	7- 8 posts

Fig.2.11 determination of administrative posts in CDVEC
Rochford Review (2002)

The Rochford Review (2002, p.50) reported that the above model is aimed at determining a fair and consistent allocation of posts in schools. He did however state that the actual grade structure to attach to the school administration posts must take account of the duties allocated to them and the supervisory structure required. He also advised of the need for a separate review of the Further Education (PLC) sector that may have a significant impact on the nature of school administration needs in the future.

2.3.4   Post Rochford Review (2002)

The 'administrative staff' in the schools and colleges of CDVEC were extremely disappointed with the implementation of the Rochford Review (2002) implemented at a time of great change in the vocational education

sector. The full impact of the 1998 Education Act and Vocational Amendment Act (2001) was now being experienced in the schools and colleges. There was serious disappointment expressed that the review did not take account of the changing role of the 'school secretary' in terms of workload, work practices and increased accountability and responsibility being placed on them. The only comfort from the review apart from the three up-gradings above that of Grade IV level in threes schools was in terms of a small increase in administrative personnel in some schools from 0.5 to one additional staff member and a number of up-gradings from Grade 111 to Grade IV   In some schools the 'school secretary' remained on their own without any additional administrative support provided. There remained a glimmer of hope for schools that had a further education (FE) sector. The Rochford Review (2002) recommended the need for an independent study on this category of school. Now eight years later this has not happened leaving a very unsatisfactory administrative situation in place.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter informed the reader of the background from which this study was emerging. It commenced by discussing the education system in Ireland from many angles to include the governing role of DES, the vocational education sector, IVEA and CDVEC. It then went on to discuss the role of the 'school secretary' and the many stakeholders with whom they interact. It looked at the complexity of the role in terms of the functions they perform, the inadequate staffing levels and the lack of professional development in place to assist them in their role.

This chapter discussed the societal issues that influenced this study starting with the EU enlargement and industrial relations climate of the 1980s. It discussed the national wage agreements that emerged from the early 1980s to the beginning of the new millennium. It also discussed the state of the economy during these years and how it went from the recession of the 1980s

to the celtic tiger era of the mid 1990s right into the beginning of the 21st Century. It looked at the changes that schools and colleges had faced in the last decade and the many new initiatives that had been introduced into colleges.

The final part of the chapter discussed the results of the implementation of the Rochford Review (2002) and the implication of the findings on the administrative staff working in the schools and colleges of CDVEC. The following chapter will provide a detailed literature review of areas that are relevant to the research topic. They include literature on environmental and organisational change, organisational response, education administration, education management, education leadership and continuing professional development.

Chapter 3

Literature Review

'An Exploration of the Role of the School Secretary/Administrator in the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee' (CDVEC)

Introduction

The current literature on the role of the 'school secretary' is limited. A former school principal (Casanova 1991, p.14) reported that her study on the role was made difficult by the dearth of literature on school administration. As a result she had to draw on the literature from other related studies to assist in her review.

The purpose of this literature review is to examine key issues, concepts, policies and procedures on the role of the school secretary.   The purpose is also to establish a framework of related knowledge that exists on the role into which new perspectives gained from the study can be incorporated. Casanova (1991) states that without an underlying framework the research findings, while interesting, may remain isolated and the sought for understanding will remain elusive. Creswell (2009, p. 25) also comments on the importance of the literature review in establishing a framework for the study and describes how it will act as a benchmark for comparing the results with other findings.

The literature review contributes to the building of theories sensitive to the researchers need to develop a feasible and valuable methodological plan for change. It helps the researcher generate questions for the targeted population and guides the researcher into areas that otherwise she might not

have considered. It also provides validation for the researcher's development plan (Persaud, 2005, p.14).

The researcher related six areas of relevance to the research topic for examination in order to inform her on the most up to date thinking and developments on the role and relevance of the school secretary.

1) Environmental & Organisational Change
2) Organisational Response
3) Education Administration
4) Education Management
5) Educational Leadership
6) Continuing Professional Development

3.1   Environmental and Organisational Change

Environmental factors are often the driver for change, but how organisations respond is the critical factor. The managerial capabilities of companies help to determine organisational responses. Jarrett (2008, p. 17) describes change leadership at the top, middle and bottom of the organisation as of crucial importance and believes that this is something that should be audited and bolstered. He believes the more organisations are locked into the status quo, the more cumbersome a company becomes when it tries to convert a desire for change into real action. Organisations with greater levels of internal dynamic capabilities have a source of competitive advantage as they can adapt more easily.

The organisation structure of the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee (CDVEC) can be compared to the machine metaphor of Morgan (2006) in his study on organisational structures. He uses the machine metaphor to gain an insight into organisations that are hierarchical in

structure and where rules and regulations are used to gain compliance and achieve organisational goals. This type of structure emerged from the scientific management school of thought of the industrial revolution period of the late nineteenth century.

The world of vocational education in terms of programme development, design and delivery is greatly affected by what is happening in the business world. Many would argue that business models of management cannot be imported into the world of education. In her study of the student service department, at Robert Morgan Educational Centre (RMEC), a vocational school located in South Dade County, Florida, Persaud (2005, p.1) inform us of the many different programmes of education they provide to over two thousand five hundred students. She is of the belief that the behaviour of the staff in the student services department (including secretary) can have a positive or negative effect on a student either undertaking a course or completing their studies in the college.

Companies need to scan and complete constant 'radar sweeps' of the environment for trends that will or may affect their business. Jarrett (2008) refers to this as scanning the horizon. He stresses the need for information to be collected on what competitors are doing and what their customers are thinking. Just as this is apt for the business environment it is also apt in the world of education. Those involved in the delivery and design of courses in VEC schools and colleges need to be fully aware of what is happening in the business world and what their competitors are planning and doing at all levels of education. Jarrett (2008) advises of the need to be cognizant of the 'soft data' that comes from their own workers and managers about what they are seeing in the marketplace.

In the corporate world Jarrett (2008, p. 12) describes three obstacles that immediately come to mind for corporate failure. He describes how these three obstacles affect the organisations responsiveness to change.

1) Managerial factors,
2) Environmental conditions,
3) Organisational issues.

3.1.1 Managerial Factors

Jarrett (2008, p. 12) describes how every leadership team faces the prospect of having

- Its own mental models,
- Biases or blind spots such as not keeping up with the trends and making only models they like (Polaroid's painfully slow move, took nearly two decades to move from thin film to digital)
- Damaging unresolved conflict among the top -team

3.1.2 Environmental Conditions

Jarrett (2008, p. 12) points out how many people first think of how a company responds to environmental conditions as the first obstacle facing corporate failure and how this occurs when there are

- Ecological and industry dynamics at play.
- Disruptive technology, or legislative changes (he cites IBM who was committed to selling mainframes to a world moving towards PCs.)

This can happen anytime where there are new competitors among other sweeping changes in one's business environment, such changes can catch a company unaware and impede even the very successful enterprise.

3.1.3 Organisational Factors

Jarrett (2008, p.13) describes how organisations can fail as a result of

- Having a corporate culture that is closed to learning new habits – such companies cannot learn how to play new games

- Having an unhealthy degree of structural inertia

- Overflowing with a level of political machinations, self-interests

- Rife within organisation silos

- Having a structure in which key units of the enterprise don't communicate or work well with other units

- Organisations knowing what needs to be done and who are inept of doing it

3.1.4   Impact of Croke Park Agreement

The Public Service Agreement (2010-2014) became known as the Croke Park Agreement (2010) following negotiations that took place in the Croke Park Conference Centre between representatives of Government, Civil Service and Public Service Trade Unions. Following the balloting of members these negotiations led to the acceptance of the Public Service agreement (IMPACT, 2010). This agreement followed the publication of the report of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure Programmes (2009). This report was commissioned by the Irish Government in light of the economic crisis in the country and cries from the private sector on the recommendations for public spending cuts and reform of the Irish Public Service. The OECD report (2008, p.79) drew attention to the Better Local Government (1996) report that highlighted the need for reform in the Civil and Public Service to one that was responsive, flexible and innovative that meets the needs of a modern, highly diversified, increasingly complex society and a complex economy.

The Public Service agreement (2010-2014) proposes that the Irish Public Service continues its contribution to the return of economic growth and economic prosperity to Ireland, while delivering excellence in service to the Irish people. This agreement describes how this reform would be implemented by working together to build an increasingly integrated Public Service that is leaner and more effective and focussed more on the needs of the citizen. Morgan (2006) describes the need for organisations to transfer from a mechanistic bureaucratic way of thinking to a more fluid and flexible way or to a more organic structure as described by Jarrett (2008). Trachman (1993) reminds 'school secretaries' of the Public Service role they perform. School secretaries in the VEC sector are members of the Irish Public Service.

Section 3.4 of the agreement (p. 24) refers to the need for a comprehensive review of the existing employment terms and conditions for staff in the VEC sector (excluding teachers and special needs assistants) to harmonise them with similar grades in the Public Service. This agreement includes a moratorium on the replacement of non-academic staff in CDVEC that is already having significant effects on their administrative staff. Staff retiring, on sick or on maternity leave are not replaced. Moran (2011) compares the signing of the agreement that guarantees all Public Sector jobs and pay for the next four years, as giving a sense of surrealism and compares it to Neville Chamberlain's triumphant "Peace in our Times" agreement.

IMPACT (2011) in their newsletter recognises that in order to achieve the saving outlined in the Croke Park (2010) agreement, in the context of reduced resources and numbers, the Public Service will need to be re-organised and public bodies and individual public servants will have to increase their flexibility and mobility to work together across sectoral, organisational and professional boundaries.

3.2 Organisational Response

The City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee (CDVEC) has embraced continuous change since its inception under the 1930 Vocational Education Act. Trant (2007), McGarr (2008), and Cooke (2009) trace the changes that have taken place. Trant (2007) and McGarr (2008) look at the changes in programme development in the Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) area that were a response to the requirements of the 1980s to meet the demands of the employment sector. McGarr (2008) commented on how VECs are now seen as strong pillars of society and how this was not always the case when they were seen as the poor cousins in education. She pays special tribute to the introduction of the National Qualifications Framework (NFQ) and how this was a significant change factor in recent years. Cooke (2009) highlights the role played by IVEA in conjunction with the Department of Education and Skills (DES) and FĀS in promoting vocational education in Ireland. Stewart (2008) describes how CDVEC has responded to the needs of the Community and Employers in providing courses to meet the changing demands in society. She pays tribute to the staff of CDVEC as a main contributor to their success.

3.2.1 Changes in the Curriculum

In his research on curriculum change that spanned a twenty year period Trant (2007) points out that many of the courses established and developed during the recession of the 1980s for which there was great demand were no longer as relevant to meet the needs of students in the 21st century. This was particularly noticeable in the demand for IT courses developed in the 1990s for which the level of demand dropped emerging in the first instance from the business world. The reasons for this were seen as twofold: firstly a surge in demand for the purchase of new technology prior to and purchased immediately after the start of the new millennium. Secondly, saturation

point of some IT courses developed in the 1990s and with the advances in IT hardware and software were now more user friendly. The introduction of transition year in some schools and colleges saw many of these programmes now being introduced.

Casanova (1991), Trachman (1993) and Persaud (2005) describe how 'school secretaries' and those involved in providing clients and stakeholders information in relation to the various programmes of study on offer must familiarise themselves with the school curriculum, courses and services provided by their school and the education environment in which they have to cope.

3.2.2   New Legislation in Education

Further changes were experienced in CDVEC with the enactment of the 1998 Education Act together with the passing of the 2001 Vocational (Amendment) Act that heralded a new era for the vocational sector. It laid the structural and operational foundation that would strengthen the VEC's and confer considerable capacity and flexibility on them to function as modern and efficient local education authorities. The new century signalled a significant change of direction for VEC's, with their increased and expanded functions (Moriarty, 2008). The Student Support Bill (2008) established VEC's as the sole agents for the single unified statutory student support scheme. CDVEC administers the PLC Maintenance Grant Scheme; the Third Level Maintenance Grants Scheme for Trainees (TLT) and the VEC Committee Scholarship Scheme on behalf of DES (CDVEC Student Handbook, 2010. p.1).

Moriarty (2008) in the IVEA (2008) report describes how the vocational education sector has responded to the many challenges they have faced over the last decade and predicts the challenges they are about to face in the next decade where most of the up-skilling of eighty-five thousand people will lie

within the VEC remit. Trant (2007), Cooke (2009) and Wittmann (2008, pp. 33-35) highlight the role played by those in education in the up-skilling and training of students as contributing to the success of knowledge economies and to organisations big or small.

3.3. Education Administration

The origins of education management lie within what is known in England and Wales as education administration (Gunter, 2001). From the 1960s onwards there was a rapid growth in the provision of postgraduate courses in educational administration (p. 89) and there has always been a strong emphasis on creative ways of supporting the learning process. It has now become an accepted feature of professional development that teachers and post-holders in schools undertake an award-bearing course such as a Master's degree. The recent growth in the taught doctorate (Ed.D) provides opportunities to combine workplace learning with the development and practice of research literacy. Critics of those undertaking post-graduate courses in education administration in earlier years saw those enrolled as coming from a strong network of the management of schools and colleges and believed the reason for undertaking these courses was to secure a balance in the name of the public interest (Bogdanor, 1979, p. 161).

Administration described by Blumberg (1994, p.60) as a craft of life-long inquiry agenda for a professor that if pursued and written about appropriately, can have very direct relevance for the practitioner. Administration can start to be understood as an elegant mixture of imagination skills, reflective thinking, and the use of personal knowledge, which somehow interacts with one's experience. He produced a set of guidelines to which a university faculty in educational administration might anchor its thinking. It could be argued that the guidelines produced by Blumberg (1994) are not far removed from the scientific principles produced by Taylor during his working career as an engineer or the

principles of Fayol produced by him at the end of his working career as a manager. It is however stated that the principles of Taylor and Fayol clearly set the guidelines for the development of modern management (Considine, 2001, p.4).

3.3.1   Role of School Secretary

The most surprising findings in the analysis by Casanova (1991, p. 114) of the textbooks of Educational Administration in her study on the role of the 'school secretary' was the almost total omission of the 'school secretary'. She described how it was particularly interesting that several of the authors of the textbooks analysed emphasised the school's public relations programme. They presented models for administrators (principals) to follow. They spoke of the importance of school-community relations and of attending to the informal networks of communications. They never mentioned the role of the 'school secretary' in such activities, which could lead to the belief that what 'school secretaries' do and how they do it is of little consequence in the schools.

Schools secretaries and student services departments have been described by Casanova (1991), Trachman (1993) and Persaud (2005) as being at the centre or the hub of the organisation. They also refer to 'school secretaries' as the first point of contact for students and the general public. They receive numerous enquires on courses available from those involved in both business and education. Casanova (1991) sees the 'school secretary' as a great source of information and recommends that they are employed to the benefit of all stakeholders in education. Persaud (2005, p.2) in her study was concerned that the quality of communication and information provided to clients by the students services department was responsible for a decrease in student enrolments and retention of students on courses.

Just as there are a hundred ways of teaching a lesson in the classroom, so there are a hundred ways of organising a school office. Attwood (2008, p.1) director of the school of educational administration sees the problem as "traditionally the focus of the school has been on what happens in the classroom. The school office has been treated as something that is as it is. Because of this, school administration has tended to evolve quite slowly, while teaching and learning has undergone radical transformations". Attwood (2008), a former teacher describes how observation studies suggests that different schools organise their administration in different ways and some approaches can make a significant difference to the effectiveness and efficiency of the school's work.

Trachman (1993, p. 12) in her 'school secretary' survival guide advises 'school secretaries' that the public aspect of their work is often underestimated and overlooked which is extremely important. She states "your professionalism and warmth go a long way to helping to create a good environment for the students in your school". In the survival guide (p. 319) she describes the background information for 'school secretaries' as educational, professional and outlines the vocabulary related to education administration.

The Director of the School of Educational Administration sponsored by Hamilton House Mailings and Oxford Open Learning Centre describes how they offer a National Certificate in Education Administration (Attwood 2008, p.1). This course is designed for practising school administrators (school secretaries) who are seeking to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of the management and administration of their school. One student who undertook the course commented on how it gave her an in-depth insight into the 'educational world' and was very useful and relevant. They also invite school administrators to stay in touch with key events by joining the school administration group.

3.4 Education Management

School management is now regarded as complex as business management (Lyons, 2010). He describes how the roles of those in senior positions in schools are characterised by a multi-faceted network of managerial functions that was not the case in the mid 1970s. Those who work in schools operate in an atmosphere of rapid change and complexity and this situation calls for a serious focus on the skills of management (Lyons, 2010, p.2). The role played by principals is critically important in that they are key players in the change process that schools have been experiencing for the last two decades. Their roles have been compared to that of site based managers, who as leaders are expected to become facilitators of decision making, providing and sharing information, developing networks of relationships, sharing authority, being accountable to communities and managing the components associated with shared decision making (Morgan and Sugrue, 2008, p.9) and Slater (2008, p.55).

3.4.1 Education Management versus Business Management

Lyons (2010, p. 2) cites Poster (1976) who warned of the great danger he saw in the application of business management theory and techniques to education and worried that educational management was being approached from the outside. He claimed that the business management approach was utterly alien to the mind of relationships that are necessary in a school if it is to function effectively. The major difference in the understanding of management theory between school personnel and industrialists is in the '*language*' used by both in education and industry (Lyons, 2010, p.2).

Hennigan (2001) describes how business and education were once seen as competing enterprises, and at times, fundamental enemies, but how they have recently began to embrace one another to create a more holistic

approach. A well-rounded education that meets the demand for skilled employees as well as knowledgeable and intellectually developed citizens is a generally agreed goal of government.

This is further emphasised by Buckley and Monks (2008, p.147) who describe how a programme designed by Dublin City University (DCU) is both an educational and developmental experience for managers who are working in rapidly changing organisations. They describe how the programme is based on the adult learning model of Knowles (1990) and on the continuous change understanding of modern organisational functions of Weick & Quinn (1999). Research has indicated how leadership in the field of education has a long and ambivalent relationship with the world of business management (Hallinger and Snidvongs, 2008, p.9).

In her study of elementary 'school secretaries' in the USA in the early 1990s Casanova (1991, p. 114) believed that business administration and school administration from a 'school secretary' perspective are separate. The reason for this she believed is because the public relations responsibilities of the 'secretary' who spend most of their time interacting with people are more important than routine secretarial tasks. She felt that in a business setting the secretary's value may lie in her clerical skills first and her human relations skills second (p.123). She describes schools as multicultural societies that can be better seen and understood as cultural settings rather than as business organisations (p.122).

In contrast to this argument Persaud (2005, p.1) in her study on the frontline services department in RMEC Vocational School in Florida, sees education as the business of the institution. She believes there is definitely a strong demand for a competitive edge in the business of education. She states that customer satisfaction is an important goal of any educational business, no matter if they are profit, non-profit, industrial, or an educational

organisation. She sees this as a key element to their success or failure and the importance of teaching employees how to give better customer service.

3.5   Education Leadership

A review of the literature on education over the last decade highlights the many changes that have taken place in schools and colleges in terms of legislation, curriculum change, student population and new initiatives. This would suggest the need to look at these changes and how they impact on the educations system.

The passing of the Education Act (1998) marked a watershed in the system and underlined 'school leadership' as a key dimension of school life as society re-interprets the role of the school in meeting the transition from an industrial society to the needs of an emerging knowledge –based society in the twenty-first century (McDonald, 2008, P.27).

Many models of leadership have been defined and developed and practised by school principals. The following are four most widely practised. Often times the leadership approach experienced by principals include elements of a number or almost all four styles/approaches.

1)   Distributed Leadership
2)   Collaborative Leadership
3)   Visionary Leadership
4)   Transformational Leadership

3.5.1   Distributed Leadership

The literature on leadership has described the need to focus on empowerment and decentralised leadership. Muijs and Harris (2003, p.439)

see this type of leadership as more fluid and emergent rather than a fixed phenomenon where every person in one way or another can demonstrate leadership. Morgan and Sugrue (2008, p.9) discuss how distributed leadership has become a necessity rather than an option to address this 'crisis' of the growing complexity of school leadership. Bennett et al (2003, p.3) view leadership from the potential that resides in people and the human potential available to be released within an organisation. They see distributed leadership as a way of thinking about leadership rather than as another technique or practice (p.3) that can help others to embrace goals, and understand the changes that need to strengthen teaching and learning that works towards improvement. It is seen as a concentration of engaging expertise within the organisation rather than seeking it through the formal position or role of the leader (Harris, 2004, p.13). She describes that barriers to distributed leadership operating in schools lie within major structural, cultural and micropolitical issues that can make it difficult to implement.

3.5.2   Collaborative Leadership

Persaud (2005, p.1) in her study on frontline services describes how the behaviour of organisational leaders can have an effect on employees' behaviour in customer service. She believes that leaders of organisations can create a climate of support in both communications and compensation that will increase employees desire to deliver quality customer service. Bush (2008, p.6) refers to an article by Slater (2008) who examined the increasingly important issue of leadership capacity and the role that leaders can play in developing others. Muijs and Harris (2003, p. 443) suggests a number of ways collaborative leadership can be developed to include:

- Discussing issues such as curriculum matters
- Developing school-wide plans,

- Leading study groups
- Organising visits to other schools
- Collaborating with colleagues

Muijs and Harris (2003, p. 444) describe how research has found that the more successful school is where teachers are given time to collaborate with one another and the need for professional development programmes to focus not just on the development of teacher's skills and knowledge but also on collaborative work to include collaborating with others. (p. 444). Slater (2008, p. 62) sees communication systems, skills and strategies as an integral part of building leadership capacity within a school. She describes how trust develops when a leader uses effective communication to engage others in personal interaction and how this style decreases organisational fear and encourages the risk-taking that provides the opportunities for others to be leaders.

3.5.3 Visionary Leadership

A study carried out on principals and deputy principals found that eighty - six per cent of respondents agreed that visionary leadership was vitally important to schools and had a central place in 21st century education. They also found that the principal and deputy are the promoter and guardian of the vision. The leadership role embodies the visionary aspect of managing a school. A good vision, they claim, not only has worthy goals, but also challenges and stretches everyone in the school (Hurley 2010, p.56). The men and women responsible for bringing vocational education to where it is today were described by Moriarty (2009) and chronicled in Cooke (2009) as 'visionary missioners'.

Visionary leadership strongly drives 'emotional climate' upwards and transforms the spirit of the organisation at many levels (Goldman, Boyatzisr

and McKee, 2002. p. 57). In the corporate world Zalezink (2008, p.p.1-2) argues that the essential elements of inspiration, vision and human passion are what drive corporate success. The OECD report (2008, p.14) describes how success in achieving the vision of a more integrated Public Service will require strong leadership at political and administrative levels to move from a traditional control position to one of vision, support and direction in developing the modernisation and change agenda.

3.5.4   Transformational leadership

An early study of leadership found that at the top of the leadership pyramid is the transformational leader who converts followers into leaders and who may in turn convert leaders into moral agents of change (Burns, 1978, p.4). This view is further illustrated by Leithwood, Jantzi and Setinbach (1999) who see transformational Leadership as categorised into generic and global dimensions that are action orientated and so lead to particular practices that in turn lead to positive outcomes. They see collaboration as central to the outcomes as illustrated in fig. 3.1.

Dimensions	Outcomes
Direction Setting • Building a shared vision • Developing consensus about goals • Creating high performance expectations	Highly respected Trusted Symbolise success
Developing People • Providing individualised support • Creating intellectual stimulation • Modelling practices and values important for the school	People are central to an organisation Structures and tasks cannot be understood except through people
Redesigning the organisation • Culture building • Creating and maintaining shared decision making structures and processes • Building relationships with the community	Collaboration is central to outcomes

Fig. 3.1 Transformational leadership adapted from
(Leithwood et al. 1999)

3.5.5 Education Leadership and the role of the School Secretary'

Two former 'school principals' comment on how the school secretary's work is largely defined by the leadership role of the school principal (Casanova, 1991 and Trachman, 1993). Their role is also defined by the culture of the school and the community in which it operates (Casanova 1991, p.14). Trachman (1993, p. 97) points out that every principal has his or her own ideas about how the school should function and if the 'school secretary' is aware of these ideas they can take them into consideration in the performance of their role. Casanova (1991) sees the role as largely providing a supportive role to the principal and how this relationship can vary from school to school (p. 83) and described their work as an extension to the arm of the principal (p. 85) in making sure that the school runs as

smoothly and as effectively as possible. The Rochford Review (2002, p.50) stated that the actual grade to attach to school administration posts must take account of the duties allocated to them and the supervisory internal structure required in the school.

3.5.6   Education Leadership and Student Behaviour

The results of a study on leadership by Hunter-Lowe (2007, p.34) found that leaders in education, who do not have strong leadership, are not sensitive to the needs of students and teachers, may influence disruptive behaviours. This would concur with the findings of Leithwood and Riehl (2003, p.3) who conclude that the effects of leadership on student learning are small but educationally significant.

The advice for school leaders in terms of the leadership styles they adapt appears to be situational in that leaders must be flexible and able to adjust to the situation at hand   This advice becomes difficult when the situation appears unique such as in handling disruptive behaviour events (Hunter-Lowe, 2007, p. 33).

3.6.   Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

The Expert Group Future Skills Needs (EGFSN, 2007, p.10) reported that if there is no policy change, educational attainment projections for 2020 will show a shortage of qualified professionals at NFQ Level eight to ten, a significant shortage at levels six and seven and a surplus at NFQ levels one to five. The report envisaged a knowledge economy for Ireland's future focused on high valued-added products and internationally traded services that rely on innovation as the primary engine of growth. In order to realise this vision, Irish enterprise needs to realise that at occupational level, the

greatest increases in employment are expected to occur in the 'professional', 'associate professional' and 'personal & service' occupational groupings.

The EGFSN (2007) report concluded that management development was a critical policy issue for Ireland. It saw the direct benefit of management development being the impetus it provides for training of other employees that has much wider consequential up-skillings.

3.6.1   Training and Professional Development For Support Staff

The training of support staff in schools and colleges is strongly encouraged by Bush and Middlewood (2005, pp.31-42) to provide a more holistic approach for student needs. The changing nature of the support staff phenomenon is seen as part of a whole new reconstruction of schools and schooling in the postmodernist era (Kerry and Kerry, 2003, p.8). They see as crucial that leaders have 'vision and awareness' of the human resources needed to fulfil this 'vision' and cope with the changes that are destined for the future and build on it, otherwise they see it as an opportunity lost.

In their role as editors of the first issue in the 50[th] anniversary of educational research Fletcher-Campbell and Brill (2008, p.3) outline the different areas of research that have taken place over the years and that include issues that are relevant today but not fifty years ago. These include a body of professional development not only for teachers but also for support staff in schools, drawing attention to the change over the years, in the nature of the school workforce and the involvement of staff from other professional backgrounds.

The National Partnership Forum (2008) makes reference to the fact that educational establishments do not have a good history of up-skilling their own staff and how this could have significant consequences for the future.

The EGFSN (2007, p.40) report does however comment on the level of qualifications already obtained by those employed in the Public Administration service, education and health sectors. They indicate high educational attainment in Europe, with on average less than fifteen per cent of employment with lower secondary education or less and well above a third with higher. In the Public Administration sector, Ireland is very close to the European average.

This is further confirmed in references in the CDVEC Committee meetings that spanned over a fifty-year period since its foundation in 1930 to 1980. They make reference to the high qualification entry required for their clerical staff. The entry requirements in 1982 for clerical staff were: at clerk typist level that required the Intermediate Certificate and qualifications in Shorthand and Typing. There were two separate panels at Clerical Officer level both requiring Leaving Certificate and one that also required Shorthand at (80 w.p.m) and Typing Qualifications at (40 w.p.m). On the NFQ framework this would equate to a minimum of Level 5 standard.

3.6.2   Training and Professional Development for Administrative Staff

The CDVEC Staff handbook (2007, p. 38) outlines the career development for their administrative, academic and maintenance staff.   It outlines how it is the practice of CDVEC to encourage and assist administrative staff to obtain suitable qualifications, which will increase their contribution to CDVEC and assist in their personal development. This assistance may include: help towards the cost of course fees, study and examination leave. In contrast to the training and assistance provided for the 'administrative staff' it also states (p.38) that CDVEC provides 'continuous professional development' for the academic staff, craft workers, general operatives and related grades".

The Rochford Review (2002, p.80) on the restructuring of administrative posts in the VEC sector accepted the need to develop the capabilities and skills of staff by the introduction of focused and relevant training programmes. However, they specified under this heading that it was a matter for individual committees. The report indicated that the infrastructure required, ranged from formal training courses to networked courses. It made reference to how the DES's role in the area of staff development was to provide assistance, having regard to budgetary and value for money considerations.

3.6.3   Research in the USA on School Secretaries

The Chairperson of the 'school secretaries' Chapter of the United Federation of Teachers Union (UFT) Ervolina (2008, p.1) describes how a top priority for them is providing the professional development 'school secretaries' want and need. Each year the executive committee coordinate a new 'secretaries' institute, a midyear seminar, a leadership weekend, an awards luncheon that honours one secretary from each borough of New York State as 'secretary of the year'. They are also required to obtain a pedagogical licence or certificate to operate in schools (Abrams, 2008, p.1). The UFT 'school secretaries' chapter was presented with an American Federation of Teacher's Educational Service and Programmes.

In her recommendations on her study of 'school secretaries' Casanova (1991, p.134) recommended that opportunities for professional training be provided for school secretaries, specifically in the areas indicated by the 'school secretaries' who responded to the survey, which included child development and cross-cultural understanding. Casanova (1991) also recommended enhancing the qualifications for entry into the job. Most important is the need for increased attention to interpersonal skills, willingness to tolerate the unpredictability and variety of the job, evidence of good judgement, and interest in children and education.

3.6.4 Research in the UK on School Administrators (School Secretaries)

Research undertaken by Attwood (2008, p.1) reported a rise in the concept of the 'school administrator' as an influence on the school. The School of Educational Administration is charged with the responsibility for developing the work of administrators in schools in the UK through its research information and publishing activities. His research has highlighted that 'school administrators' often feel ignored both within their own school and within education, and consequently the aim of the School of Educational Administration is to improve the profile of 'school administrators' throughout the UK. Funding for the school is provided equally by the Government and Industry and through the Certificate in Educational Administration course validated by the Institute of Administrative Management.

3.7 Conclusion

This literature review examined the role of the 'school secretary' in the education system. It looked at how environmental and organisational changes taking place in the business world affected the world of education and in turn the 'school secretary'. It recommended the strategies required to succeed in the global economy of the 21st century Jarrett (2008).

The literature review examines environmental changes that drive change in the vocational sector and the organisational responses to these changes over the last three decades in terms of curriculum change as discussed by Trant (2007) and McGarr (2008). The significant role of the IVEA and the impact of education legislation is discussed by Cooke (2009). The literature on the services of CDVEC is discussed through Stewart (2008), (2009) and (2010) in the Guide to Courses and Services of CDVEC, Staff Handbook (2007) and Student Handbook (2010).

Casanova (1991) and Trachman (1993) highlight how the role and work of the 'school secretary' is very much determined by the school principal. An examination of the many facets of leadership required by school principals to carry out their role in today's educational environment was conducted. The 1998 Education Act and its impact on the leadership role of the principal is discussed by McDonald (2008). Bush and Slater (2008) discuss the significant role leaders play in developing the school community. The crucial role and key players that leaders exemplify in organisational change is discussed by: Lyons (2010), Morgan and Sugrue (2008) and Slater (2008).

Bennett, et al. (2003) and Muijs and Harris (2003) comment on the decentralisation of leadership and Morgan and Sugrue (2008) on distributed leadership and how both philosophies play a central role in the complexity of school life and its potential for the development of others. Harris (2004) who points out the barriers experienced in terms of structural, cultural and micropolitical ones that make distributed leadership difficult to implement.

Transformational leadership is seen at the top of the pyramid (Burns, 1978), Leithwood et al (1999) and Hunter-Lowe (2007), through the visionary aspect that creates a shared vision where people are central to its success. Similar to the transitional leader is the visionary leader who is considered vitally important not only for goal attainment but for challenging and developing the school community.

The review examines what is written on education administration in relation to the 'school secretary'. It highlights that what is written on the role usually refers to school management. The origins of education administration are discussed through Gunter (2001), Bogdanor (1979) and Blumberg (1994).

The final part of the review discusses the training and professional development in place for school secretaries. The literature looks at the

EGFSN (2007) report that forecasts the skill requirements for the workforce up to 2020. It predicts a shortage of qualifications at Levels 6 and 7 on the NFQ if there is no change in policy on up-skilling in the workforce. Educational researchers Bush and Middlewood (2005), Kerry and Kerry (2003), Fletcher-Campbell and Brill (2008) discuss the importance of the development of support staff in schools to meet the challenges of the 21[st] Century.

The current provision of training and professional development in place for 'school secretaries' is addressed through Ervolina (2008) in the USA and Attwood (2008) in the UK. The Rochford Review (2002) points out that the administrative staff in CDVEC require training and development and highlight how this is a matter for individual VEC's. Casanova (1991) recommends enhancing the qualifications for entry into the profession of 'school secretary'.

The following chapter of this study discusses the research methodology used by the researcher.

Chapter 4

Research Methodology

'An Exploration of the Role of the School Secretary/Administrator in the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee' (CDVEC)

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an outline of the research for the reader. The researcher discusses her reasons for choosing an interpretive methodology and a qualitative method for this study. This chapter addresses the research design and the data collection method chosen to explore the role and impact of the 'school secretary' in the education system. She explains how the conceptual framework for the study was constructed and the rationale of a critical theory approach to her study. She discusses issues of ethics, triangulation, reliability and validity.

4.1   Conceptual Framework for Study

Creswell (2010, p. 5) describes the framework used to explain the research design. He refers to it as the plan or proposal to conduct research and how it involves the intersection of philosophy, strategies of inquiry and philosophical worldview.

Smyth (2004, p.1) describes how a conceptual framework is a broad set of ideas and principles taken from relevant fields of enquiry and used to structure research. The framework becomes the heart of the study and scaffolds and strengthens the research. It assists in the design of the research, in making clear links from the literature to the research goals and

questions. It acts as a reference point for the discussion of literature, methodology and analysis of data and assists the researcher in making meaning of subsequent findings. Finally, it validates the reliability and trustworthiness of the research. Fig. 4.1 illustrates the framework adopted by the researcher for this study.

Fig. 4.1. Conceptual Framework

| **Philosophical Worldview** |
| **Advocacy/Participatory** |

↓

| **Methodology** |
| **Interpretive Sociology** |

↓

| **Approach** |
| **Critical Theory** |
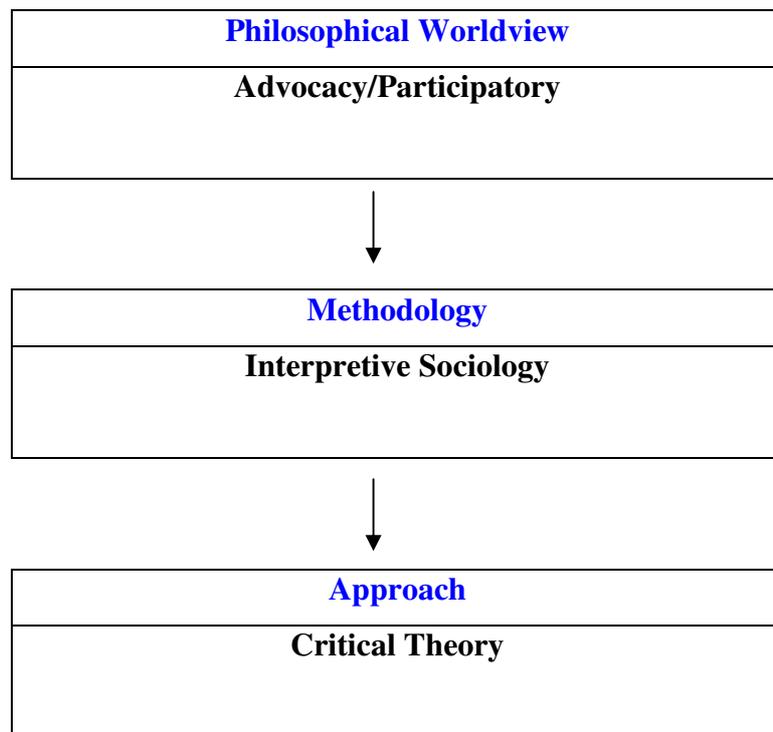
Fig. 4.1 Conceptual Framework for Study

The researcher aware of the fact that the conceptual framework is a construction of knowledge bounded by the life-world experiences of the person developing it and should not be attributed a power that it does not have. She is also aware that the nature of a conceptual framework means that it consciously, or unconsciously informs thought and practice by increased personal sensitivity to notice particular occurrences so this must be accounted for. Smyth (2004, p. 2) points out that no researcher can expect that all data will be analysed using the framework without risk of

limiting the results from the investigation. By considering these cautions the researcher hoped that she could remain open to new or unexpected occurrences in the data and the investigation.

4.1.2   Research Design - Philosophical Approach to Study

The design of a research study includes the overall approach to be taken and detailed information about how the study will be carried out, with whom and where. A concise statement about the overarching research design is often missing or hard to discern in published reports of qualitative research (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994).

The philosophical assumptions held by the researcher can best be described as an advocacy or participatory worldview. Creswell (2010, p. 9) describes how this approach emerged in the 1980s and 1990s from individuals who felt that the post positivist assumptions imposed structural laws and theories that did not fit marginalised individuals in our society or issues of social justice that need to be addressed. He describes how historically this advocacy/participatory worldview was drawn on the works of Marx, Adorno, Marcus, Habermas, and Freire. Described as the philosophical stance of the Frankfurt School that featured in the 1950s but had showed earlier appearances in the writings of the schools principal membership.

The researcher describes how her philosophical assumptions were on the important role 'school secretaries' play in the education system and the knowledge and skill required to do the job. She felt the need for professional development and training to withstand these challenges. She also felt that the role should be seen in a more professional light and required a greater understanding and appreciation of the role of the 'school secretary' by the people in charge of the system.

4.2   Interpretive Research Methodology

A research methodology defined by Creswell (2009, p. 88) is a general approach to studying a research topic. He describes how a choice of method whether it is qualitative or quantitative should reflect an overall research strategy and how the methodology shapes which method is used and how it is used.

The research methodology selected for this study is an interpretive methodology. Fearfull (2005, p. 141) sees this methodology as different from conventional qualitative methodologies that might incorporate non-participant observations and interviews, where they could perceive little more than pressing a button, watching a machine or computer screen. From an interpretive perspective people are seen as actors in the social world, as being able to exist beyond, or maybe even because of, the social institutional order by which we are all surrounded. Fearfull, (2005,p. 139) described how it is this very order that stimulates dynamic, problem-solving and life-creating action. She argued (p. 141) how a qualitative interpretive methodology was most appropriate in her research in order to understand what knowledge and skills was required and what action must be taken. She highlighted how this methodology offered a critique of both the received view on clerical skill and knowledge that tends to operate in a bureaucratic framework and the epistemology generating such a view.   Finally, she described how this methodology encouraged clerical workers and their work to be seen from their own perspective.

 In view of her own position as a school secretary/administrator in her organisation and her philosophical assumptions on how she perceived the role and the changes encountered the researcher felt that this methodology would reflect the '*voices*' of her colleagues and other stakeholders in the organisation in terms of how they themselves see the role, the work they do

and the skills and qualifications required to carry out the role. She hoped that it would also address the dearth of literature and research available on the role of the school secretary and how the role was perceived in the education system (Casanova, 1991 and Trachman, 1993). Finally, she hoped that it would help address the effects of the Rochford Review (2002) on the administrative staff working in the schools and colleges of CDVEC.

4.2.1 Research Method

The research method used for this study is a qualitative method. Creswell (2009) encourages the use of this method to explore phenomena and to obtain the desired detailed data collection. Hunter-Lowe (2007, p. 37) describes how a qualitative approach is most suited to research where its purpose is to elicit understanding and not to test hypothesis.

The researcher reflects back on her first introduction to the great debate illustrated by Maykut and Moorehouse (1994) where quantitative research method versus qualitative research methods. Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 29) describe research as falling under three paradigm eras, the pre-positivist, positivist and post-positivist. They see the traditional paradigms as one that can be studied independently from other areas, until it can converge on reality and finally be predicted and controlled. Alternatively, they see the post positivist era as one that has multiple constructed realities out there that can be studied holistically. They see it as virtually the reverse of what characterised positivism or as a reaction to the failings of positivism because it offered a proactive set of new formulation. Greenwood and Levin (1998, p. 69) point out that the positivist view of research based on scientific knowledge is not all nonsense. Respect for systematic work with principles handling and reporting of materials, and understanding laws whose consequences are reasonably well understood are meaningful parts of science.

Based on her own philosophical assumptions and having had previous experience of carrying out both quantitative and qualitative research methods she saw the benefits from using both approaches. She felt that in view of the findings from the quantitative study of the Rochford Review (2002) and the impact of the findings in relation to the role of the 'school secretary' a qualitative method was more appropriate to this study.

4.3   Critical Theory Approach

Creswell (2010, p. 9) outlines that one of the theoretical perspectives that may be integrated with advocacy or participatory worldview assumptions that constructs a picture of the issues being examined, the people to be studied, and the changes that are needed is critical theory. Crotty (2003) informs us that the earlier followers of the 'critical theory' approach were Horkheimer and Adorno to be followed in later years by Habermas and Freire.

The researcher compares the awakening or increase in consciousness that steered her to undertake this research study to that of Freire and his critical theory philosophy 'conscientisation'. She also draws on the early work of Horkheimer and his published landmark article entitled 'traditional and critical theory. He saw traditional theory as a theory that merely reflects the current situation, where critical theory sought to change a situation and was wedded to practice whereas traditional theory was not (Crotty, 2003, p. 148).

Influenced by the results of the 'critical theory' approach adopted by Freire (1921-1997) renowned for his very effective approach to teaching literacy where through the 'voices' and experiences of the pheasant people of north-east Brazil who took part in his study led to the influence of the Ministry of

Education in Brazil in launching a literacy programme in the 1960s (Crotty 2003, p.147). Whilst by no means comparing her study to the scale of that of Freire the researcher sought to examine the practice of the 'school secretary' and the environment in which they work. She hoped that she could challenge the perceived view of the role as having little agency or influence in the organisation Fearfull (2005). Instead she was looking for an approach that had no time for empirical data and a positivist science that can be verified statistically. Like that of the Rochford Review (2002) that robbed the 'school secretary' of the work they do, their vitality and their experience (Crotty, 2003, p. 131).

4.3.1 Challenges and Criticisms of Critical Theory Approach

There are features of critical research that have emerged from the philosophy of Habermas (Crotty 2003, p. 146) that challenge the accepted 'interpretations' that focus on those who are marginalised and locate questions within social, political and economic concepts. The central epistemological tenet of Habermas was that human beings constitute their reality and organise their experience in terms of cognitive (or knowledge guiding) interests. Grundy (1987, p. 19) describes how emancipatory knowledge guiding interests that contain an action component are based on critical theory.

The researcher acknowledges the challenges to a critical theory approach but draws on the views expressed by Knights & Wilmott (1989, p. 554) who describe how the stimulus and scope for emancipatory action are shaped within capital relations. They suggest however, that there is room for alternative perspectives on the analysis of the meaning of work to people without denying the ambiguities of the concept (p.545).

The researcher acknowledges the concerns of Fearfull (2005, p. 140) for work-related research within sociology. She cites Braverman (1974) accused inappropriately for generalising the notion of craftwork as having a romantic attachment to the essential creativity of the worker. He argues that modern technology, in a capitalist society undermines skills, knowledge and craft traditions that leads to the degradation of their work and thereby the quality of the life of the worker. She describes how this may have discouraged other researchers from seeking out views, opinions and explanations of events from their participants. The researcher accepts the advice of the need for self-control in respect of the quality of work we produce, and to take pride in its production, even though the material gains made by employers as a result may be greater than those made by ourselves.

4.4   Research Sample

Creswell (2009, p. 148) suggests that initial contact be made with members of the sample to provide advanced notice of the research. He advises that the best contact method whether e-mail, ordinary mail, or personal contact depends on the participant group being utilised. He describes how a single stage sampling procedure is one in which the researcher has access to names in the population and can sample the people directly. The researcher describes how an initial contact letter was sent to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of CDVEC in 2008 (Appendix F) seeking permission to carry out research in the schools and colleges for the pilot study. Permission was granted in 2009 to extend the research to a larger study.

Data Collection Method	Research Sample
Interviews	School Secretaries/Administrators
Interviews	Principals
Interviews	Teachers, Course Co-ordinators, Guidance Counsellor, Disability Officers, Education Training Officer, Maintenance Staff
Survey	Students
Interviews & Observation Study/Field Notes	School Secretaries in New York
Interview	Senior Official IMPACT Trade Union
Interview	Senior Academic Member of CDVEC

Fig. 4.2 Research Sample

4.4.1   Sequence of Research

Six procedural steps were involved in conducting this research study. In planning the research steps every consideration was given to the stakeholders with whom the 'school secretary' interacts with on a daily or weekly basis as to their perception of the role of the 'school secretary'. A major issue was the sequence in which the research was carried out as each step informed the approach and content of the questions put to the next category of interviewees. Each step constructed new insights on the research question.   Other potential stakeholders were not selected based upon the limitations of the study. In qualitative research, participants are carefully selected for inclusion, based on the possibility that each participant will expand the variability of the sample and add to the understanding of the phenomenon being studied. The population of interest in this study is outlined in fig. 4.3

Step 1	Interviews with School Secretaries and Principals Interviews with Teachers, Programme Co-ordinators, Guidance Counsellor/Director of Adult Education, Maintenance Staff, Disability Officers and Education Training Officer.
Step 2	Comparative Study with School Secretaries in New York
Step 3	Interview with Chairman School of Educational Administration UK.
Step 4	Student Survey
Step 5	Interview with Senior Official IMPACT Trade Union
Step 6	Interview with Senior Academic Member of CDVEC Management

Fig. 4.3 Research Population

4.4.2 Data Collection Procedures

The main source of data collection for this study was qualitative interviews and surveys.   Other supplementary data included field notes, documentary evidence, observations and reflective journal.

4.4.3 Interviews

Fearfull (2005, p. 139) describes one of the benefits of using an interpretive methodology is where the researcher has work related knowledge of the role being researched, particularly where skill and knowledge are being examined.   She sees these as important, in order to develop a richer understanding of the area of research and providing the media through which the relevant body of knowledge could be informed, developed and built on.   She also spoke of the opportunities it provides for social

engagement and acquaintance with the participants many of whom the researcher was meeting for the first time.

The researcher was very conscious of the design of her interview. She had hoped that the interview would be more like a conversation without the use of semi-structured guidelines, but this changed when three school secretaries, one principal and one teacher asked if they could have an outline of the type of questions that the researcher was interested in. The researcher found the semi-structured format as described by Ribbins (2007) in his chapter in Briggs and Coleman (2007, p. 209) highly flexible and one that had an open agenda that allowed the participants talk freely on the research topic. Fearfull (2005, p. 144) describes the benefits of tape recording the interview with the consent of the interviewee in terms of fulfilling both the technical and qualitative objectives of the interview procedure.

The level of understanding and knowledge of the role of the researcher allowed her scratch beneath the surface to gain further understanding of how 'school secretaries', principals and other stakeholders viewed the role. She felt comfortable and understood what was meant when the interviewees made reference to you know 'stuff' like that (Fearfull, 2005).

4.4.4 Interviews with School Secretaries/Principals

The researcher invited 'school secretaries' (Appendix G) and principals (Appendix H) who had not taken part in the pilot study (p. 75) to participate. Eight school secretaries and nine school principals returned the acceptance slip. At the time of the interviews one 'school secretary' and one principal were unable to take up the offer due to work commitments.

Interviews commenced in April 2009 with 'school secretaries' during the Easter holiday period when school was closed and when 'school secretaries'

were available for interview. As the researcher was completing the research in her own time she was able to take annual leave. All interviews were carried out in the interviewee's place of work (Appendix A, p. 167).

4.4.5   Interviews with other stakeholders - teachers, co-ordinators, guidance counsellor, disability officers and education training officer.

The researcher in conversation with the head of a centre in CDVEC discussed the possibility of conducting interviews with teachers following an in-service. This would provide the opportunity of a random selection process to get a broader view of how the role of the '*school secretary*' was viewed. The researcher was invited in April 2009 to conduct the interview. Six teachers were attending the in-service out of which three remained to do the interview.

The researcher discussed the research with the principal of the college where she was a member of the administrative staff from May 1997. A copy of the plain language statement, informed consent form and a sample of the semi-structured questions drawn up were also provided (Appendices B, C &E). She was granted permission to interview different categories of staff between May and June 2010. This included two teaching staff with co-ordinator posts of responsibility, a co-ordinator, a senior cycle tutor, guidance counsellor/director of adult education and a group of maintenance staff. Two disability officers and an education training officer attending the college on a weekly basis looking after students with special needs were also interviewed.

4.4.6   Comparative Study in New York

Arising from the literature review a comparative study was carried out with school secretaries in New York to ascertain the professional development in place for them.

Following contact with the chairperson of the 'school secretaries' chapter of the United Federation of Teachers Union (UFT) the researcher accepted an invitation to visit New York in June 2009 to coincide with an awards ceremony for 'school secretaries'. This study included a visit to a large vocational school, the attendance at a 'training day' for all members of the UFT to include 'school secretaries' and the attendance at the awards ceremony. The Chairperson had selected five 'school secretaries' from different categories of schools in their system for the researcher to interview.

4.4.7   Research in the UK

Arising from the literature review the researcher was very interested in the professional development and training provided for 'school secretaries' by the School of Educational Administration in the UK.   The researcher contacted the chairman of the school by telephone in March 2010 informing him of the research she was undertaking and of her interest in the school of educational administration. She informed him of her intention to be in the UK later in the month and he agreed to do an interview with her at the school. Unfortunately due to geographical distance whilst in the UK the researcher was unable to travel to the school to do the interview. Instead it was agreed that the interview would take place by telephone later that evening (Appendix I).

4.4.8   Survey with Students

The researcher discussed with the principal of the college where she herself was a school secretary/administrator the possibility of conducting research with students. Due to the range of students in the college from first year to Repeat Leaving Certificate, Post Leaving Certificate and Adult Education the principal felt the best method of data collection would be by survey and only to students over eighteen years of age. It was also agreed that the survey forms would be distributed and collected by course co-ordinators.

The questions asked on the survey form were similar to those asked to other stakeholders in the research (Appendix J) and were analysed in the same way as the interviews. Casanova (1991, p. 152) describes how in her research on school secretaries in the USA that the open-ended responses to questions in her survey were so voluminous as to make coding for quantitative analysis impractical that they had to be analysed as qualitative data.

Fifty-one survey forms were distributed by four tutors to four groups of students who were in college studying for exams in May 2010.   Eighteen survey forms were distributed to a group of Repeat Leaving Certificate students and the remaining thirty-three survey forms to three groups of Post-Leaving Certificate students. A fifty-five per cent response rate, of twenty-eight survey forms were returned to the researcher by four tutor groups. A further six survey forms were returned at a later stage which were not included in the first stage of the analysis process that was presented to the senior academic member of CDVEC Head Office, however the researcher was confident that their views had been recorded.

4.4.9 Interview with Senior Official of IMPACT Trade Union

The findings from the previous categories of interviews led to an interview with a Senior Official of IMPACT Trade Union who represents the needs of the administrative staff in CDVEC (Appendix K). The researcher contacted the senior official by telephone who invited her to IMPACT headquarters to conduct the interview in June 2010.

4.4.10 Interview with Senior Academic Member of CDVEC

The final interview in the research was with a senior member of the academic staff of CDVEC. Contact was made by telephone and the researcher was invited to Head Office to conduct the interview. The findings from all interviews and the student survey were included in the research questions (Appendix L)

4.4.11 Field Notes and Observations

Casanova (1991, p. 30) described how the brief descriptions of each of the six school sites and the people who worked there provided a context for the data that followed. The researcher following her visits to the schools made notes that included observations of the building, where the 'school secretary's' office was located, the type of culture experienced and the names of people she met. She found this particularly useful whilst in the USA where she used extensive field notes to include sketches of the layout of the offices and departments visited.

4.4.12 Documentary Evidence

The documentary evidence analysed for this study included with the permission of the CEO of her organisation a random scan of the minutes of CDVEC Committee meetings from 1930 to 1980 to find out what was written on the school secretary/administrative staff. The minutes provided details of qualifications, entry requirements, grades, salary scales, up-gradings, restructuring of grades, leave entitlements, training provided and training approved, location and transfers of administrative within system and trade union representatives. It also outlined the schools and colleges in place in 1930 and when each new school, college or centre was opened.

Casanova (1991, pp. 1-13) provides a historical perspective of the school secretary in the USA. Ervolina (2008) at the school secretaries' awards ceremony gave a historic overview of the schools secretary's chapter in the UFT. Other very relevant documents analysed included a report on the separation of CDVEC and DIT in 1992, the Rochford Review (2002) on the re-structuring of administrative grades and the Department of Education Circular Letter C/L F33/2003 on the revised staffing and organisational structures in CDVEC that outlined the skills and knowledge required by the school secretary to carry out their role.

4.4.13 Reflective Journal

Murphy, Hamilton and Dempsey (2008, p.p. 71-73) in their article on the investigation of the transfer and sustainability of the reflective process into the work environment, identify variables which support or challenge practitioners to continue the ongoing process of reflection in practice. As a critical researcher a reflective diary for each step of the study was kept. The researcher found this process extremely important for a number of

reasons. Firstly, she found it assisted her in determining what the next step of the study should be. Secondly, she found it a great source of motivation and inspiration at times when the going was '*tough*' in undertaking such a large piece of research.

> Today I have had to do something else. I decided to go back to the design of my study, which is based on Ursula Casanovas (1991) and her PhD on the Elementary School Secretary in the USA. I have found this a very positive step as I felt I was getting nowhere.   I find some of the tapes hard to understand but after several re-windings I am getting there.
>
> Diary Entry – 10/11/09

Finally, it assisted her at the analysis stage of the research in relation to deciding the most suitable approach to adopt and the reasons for making this choice.

> It just feels like a lovely two- way conversation (last three tapes I have done). The language is common in a lot of ways and each person has their own individual and unique way of describing things.
>
> Diary Entry – 23/06/2010

4.4.14 Pilot Interviews

The pilot study undertaken in (2008) with four school secretaries and three school principals provided an initial test for the research questions to establish individual beliefs, values and concepts of the role and impact of the 'school secretary' in the education system (Philips and Pugh (2005, pp. 196-197). The pilot test detects weaknesses in design and instrumentation and provides proxy data for selection of a probability sample, questions to be redesigned and for appropriate data collection (Cooper & Schindler, 2003).

The findings from a pilot study highlighted how an interpretive methodology provided fresh insight and understanding of how principals viewed the role (Appendix D). It provided information on how it assisted principals in providing an education service that responded well to its students and the general public and one that freed them to be out on the corridors supporting the needs of teachers and students.

The findings also highlighted how the role had changed over the last decade particularly since the introduction of the 1998 Education Act and the need for professional development to withstand the challenges for the future. It gave insight into the number of stakeholders that the school secretary interacts with during the normal course of their work and the need to include them in a larger study. School secretaries expressed concern of the need to be included as part of a team that included better communication, collaboration and training. The findings also indicated that in colleges of further education the title 'school secretary' was not used and how they were referred to as administrator. Concerns were also expressed of how the Rochford Review (2002) had created an '*us and them*' situation between the administrative structures in CDVEC Head Office and schools. It was felt that there was not an understanding of the knowledge and skills required to carry out the role.

4.5 Data Analysis

The data analysis strategy used for this study is discourse analysis (DA). Bryman and Bell (2003, p. 388) and McEvoy and Richards (2006) describe how discourse analysis (DA) over conversation analysis (CA) is more suited to qualitative analysis because of the complex ontological and epistemological issues that are involved. Bryman and Bell (2003) and Crotty (2003) discuss the role language plays in interpretation and Fearfull

(2005, p. 147) described how language is central to how we see reality and cites Schipper (1999)

> …language is not innocent. By speaking about something in a certain way, including the use of metaphors, we can reveal, expose, but also conceal realities. Language can stigmatise people but it can also set them free.

Combined with an interpretive analytical methodology the key focus of analysis was on the language used by 'school secretaries' and other stakeholders to describe the meaning of everyday life for the 'school secretary' and the knowledge and skill required to carry out their role (Fearfull, 2005).

The researcher explains why discourse analysis was more suited to her study because it is anti-realist in that it denies that there is any external reality awaiting a definite portrayal. It disavows the notion that the researcher can arrive at a privileged account of the aspect of the social world being investigated. DA is also seen as constructionist, as the emphasis is placed on the version of reality propounded by 'school secretaries' and other stakeholders who are part of the social setting being investigated and the fashioning of that reality is through their renditions of it.

The researcher describes her process of data analysis that involved preparing all the transcripts and documents for analysis. She describes how she first read through all the data to get a general sense of the information and to reflect on its overall meaning, what the participants were saying and the language used. She was trying to get an impression of the overall depth, credibility and use of information. She made notes in the margins. At the end of reading each transcript she recorded her thoughts on its overall content and recorded salient points. She then began the coding process that involved organising the material into segments of text before bringing meaning to the information (Creswell, 2010, pp. 185-186).

There were three phases to analysing the data. The first phase involved analysing the interviews of all stakeholders from step one to four. The second phase included all the findings from the first phase of the analysis for the interview with the Senior Official from IMPACT Trade Union. The third phase included the findings from the previous two phases of analysis for the interview with the senior academic member of CDVEC.

During the analysis process the researcher parcelled out information that was similar, while at the same time uncovering interpretative repertories, which gave a unique view of how each 'school secretary' made sense of their role and how other stakeholders viewed the role. She found the combined approach of DA and interpretive analysis allowed her present the data from many different angles. It also allowed for the presentation of large amounts of data that could be used for the professional development of the role of the 'school secretary' that in turn would benefit all stakeholders for the future.

4.6   Ethical Issues, Triangulation, Reliability and Validity

The researcher drew on the research of Hunter-Lowe (2007, p. 51) who described the resources, permissions, techniques, strategies and programme management that she utilised to conduct her research.

4.6.1   Ethical issues

According to Bryman and Bell (2003, p, 536) it is crucial to be aware of the ethical principles involved and of the nature of the concerns about ethics in business research. They point to four main areas: whether there is harm to the participants; whether there is a lack of informed consent; whether there is an invasion of privacy; whether there is deception involved. The ethical stance that the researcher has taken is a univeralist one (p.538) where the ethical precepts should never be broken. She upholds the view that

infractions of ethical principles are wrong in a moral sense and are damaging to social research.

The researcher followed the guidelines of the university, which Bryman and Bell (2003, p. 537) state are often based on or influenced by codes developed by other professional associations. They point out that the ethical guidelines and ethical committees of universities are there to protect research participants as well as protecting institutions, so that the researchers will be deterred from behaving in ethically unacceptable ways that might rebound on institutions. The researcher assured the CEO of her organisation that participation in the research would be totally at the discretion of school secretaries and other stakeholders as to whether they choose to participate or not and that confidentiality and their identity would be kept anonymous and respected at all times. Ethical approval was received from the ethics committee of the university in February 2009 following a request for minor amendments to her research proposal.

The researcher found the initial stage of the interview very important in explaining the ethical link between the interviewee and the researcher. She explained how the interviewee did not need to answer any questions that they felt uncomfortable with. All interviews began with a formal introduction of the research and the purpose of the interview that was contained in the plain language statement (Appendix B). The questions were asked in a non-threatening way that aimed to discover how participants view and think about the role that was later compared with other data that was collected. Each participant signed an informed consent form (Appendix C) as part of the research, which was collected and filed in a secure location to protect the confidentiality of all participants. The researcher respected the rights of each participant by transcribing the transcripts herself and storing transcripts, surveys and interview tapes in a locked room during the data collection and analysis process (Hunter-Lowe 2007, p. 41).

4.6.2 Triangulation

Triangulation is a powerful technique that facilitates validation of data through cross verification from more than two sources so that diverse viewpoints or standpoints cast light upon a topic The purpose of triangulation in qualitative research is to increase the credibility and validity of the results. Cohen and Manion (1986) define triangulation as an attempt to map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behaviour by studying it from more than one standpoint (Olsen, 2004, p. 3).

The use of several sources of data collection in this study were essentially an effort to triangulate the different perspectives offered on the role of the 'school secretary. The data examined the skill and knowledge required and the way, in which the role was viewed in the organisation and how it was projected to organisational members (Fearfull, 2005, p. 144).

Casanova (1991, p. 119) descried how a high degree of congruence across data in her study would favour confidence in the accuracy of the description of the role of the school secretary. She also described how there was a high degree of congruence across the data generated from the school secretaries themselves, whether in their survey responses, interviews, or as a result of direct observation. She described how this was also the case with the data gathered through interviews with the school principals.

4.6.3 Validity and Reliability

Joyce (2010, p. 71) describes how the translation of the terms validity and reliability with their underlying assumptions to qualitative research are believed to be more aligned to the interpretive perspective. Qualitative validity means that the researcher checks for the accuracy of the findings by

employing certain procedures, while qualitative reliability indicates that the researcher's approach is consistent across different researchers and different projects.

On completion of transcribing the transcripts the researcher checked that they did not contain obvious mistakes and sent a copy to each of the stakeholders who were asked to amend the transcript if necessary (Creswell, 2010: 190). She discussed the emerging themes following each stage of the analysis with the participants. A report on the comparative study in the USA was discussed with the Chairperson of the 'school secretaries' chapter of UFT and a copy of this report was then sent to her. A copy of the transcribed telephone interview was sent to the Chairperson of the School of Educational Administration in the UK that was followed up with further telephone conversations where an amended report was returned to the researcher.

Validity is one of the strengths of qualitative research and is based on determining whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant and the reader (Creswell, 2009, p. 191). Discourse analysis (DA) allowed the researcher present as many meaningful and justifiable inferences from her research sample (Creswell, 2009, p. 191) and Yin (2009, p. 115) that was genuinely based on a critical investigation of all the data collected that did not depend on a few well chosen examples Silverman (2000, p. 176). Smyth (2004) cites Bryman (1988, p. 77) who expressed concerns of how there is a tendency towards an anecdotal approach to use the data in relation to conclusions or explanations in qualitative research and referred to brief conversations, and snippets from unstructured interviews that are used to provide evidence of a particular contention. Throughout the thesis, the researcher attempted to demonstrate integrity and rigour of research and has strove to make it possible for others to judge its trustworthiness by laying an audit trail of the process (Joyce, 2010, p.75).

4.7   Conclusion

This chapter explored the researchers philosophical assumptions and reasons for selecting a qualitative interpretive research methodology.   She outlined her philosophical stance as an advocacy or participatory worldview and her reasons for using a critical theory approach to the study. She examined the issues of research design that involved qualitative interviews with school secretaries, principals and other stakeholders that the 'school secretary' interacts with during the normal course of their work. She described how the literature review on professional development for 'school secretaries' encouraged her to carryout a comparative study with 'school secretaries' in New York. She described her research in the UK with the Chairman of the School of Educational Administration and the qualifications and professional development for school administrators working in the schools in the UK. The final section of the chapter discussed issues relating to ethics, reliability and validity that will guide the researcher in conducting her research and analysis.

The following chapter of this study will outline the research in detail and discuss the research analysis.

Chapter 5
Research Analysis

'An Exploration of the role of the School Secretary/Administrator in the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee (CDVEC)'

Introduction

This chapter contains a comprehensive study of the research completed. The purpose of this study was to explore the role of the 'school secretary' in the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee (CDVEC) with a view to recommending improvements in the job specification that will benefit all stakeholders. In completing the study the researcher consulted with stakeholder representatives on their understanding of the importance of the role and how it could be improved to better support the education system.

5.1   Data Analysis

A combined method of interpretive analysis and discourse analysis (an approach to language that can be applied to forms of communication other than talk) was used to analyse the data in this study. Bryman and Bell (2003, p. 385) describe how the organisational researcher who focuses on language has to explore the nature of the relationship between language and action. The researcher felt that this approach to the analysis was best suited for her data collection because DA at the epistemology and ontology levels denies that there is an external reality out there. This allowed the researcher present as much of the naturally occurring talk from the descriptions of all stakeholders interviewed and from the student survey forms.

Oswick, Kennoy and Grant (1998, p. 5) describe how discourse analysis has rarely been a primary focus of management research. They explain that one of the reasons for this relates to the preference for action rather than talk: where dialogue, discussion and debate are usually portrayed as being of secondary importance to action. . They point out the importance of discourse in understanding organisations is hard to under estimate. They explain how this is because discourse plays such a significant part in constructing, situating, facilitating and communicating the diverse cultural, institutional, political and socio-economic parameters of organisational, political and socio-economic parameters of organisational being (p. 12) similar to that already outlined by the researcher in the context chapter of this study. DA does not just provide an account of what goes on in organisations; it s also a process whereby meaning is created.

DA enabled the researcher present the language used by the different stakeholder groups from many different angles and the language used to portray how the different groups viewed each other by exploring the deeper structures that guides interpretation and actions (Heraceleous and Barrett (2001, p. 775). She would like to have used as many of the quotes as possible in her analysis of the thirty-two Microsoft Word transcripts. She was instead faced with picking out all the words and phrases used to answer questions that were similar, parcelling them together and including them in the summary. At the same time through the power of the 'experience repertoire' that is concerned with the knowledge and understanding of what is needed to do the job she uncovered unique descriptions that provides vivid images for the reader (Bryman & Bell, 2003, p.397) and Fearfull (2005).

Potter (1997, p.p. 147-148) describes how DA analysts prefer to see their style of research analysis as an analytic mentality like that of a craft skill and argue that such codification is probably impossible. DA highlights the importance of rhetorical devices in provoking identification and

commitment amongst listeners and how they are concerned with strategies in trying to create different effects from the data by locating contextual understanding in terms of the situational specific of talk. Ball and Wilson (2000) show how interpretative repertories can be used to analyse power and control in organisations and reveal the ethical position of speakers.

The use of discursive analysis enabled the researcher to interpret the changes taking place in her organisation and the way in which the school secretary and stakeholders spoke about and made sense of the changes experienced particularly since the enactment of the 1998 Education Act. It also enabled the researcher to interpret the way particular groups use talk to guide interpretation and organisational action (Heracelous and Barrett, 2001, p. 775).

Bryman and Bell (2003, p. 393) describe how discourse analysis (DA) has been applied to forms like texts, such as mission statements to illuminate issues of interest to the researcher on materials that are in the public domain. This required the researcher reading the detail, looking for rhetorical detail, accountability and cross-reference discourse and in this respect it was more suitable as a research method of analysis than conversation analysis (CA). In discourse analytic research there is also an emphasis on resources that are employed in conveying allegedly factual knowledge and attention to what has not been said.

5.1.1 Data Analysis Process

Great consideration was given to how best to approach the analysis and it was finally decided to take each question and synthesis and analyse the questions across all the research steps to discover insights and information that could inform a set of recommendations on the role of the 'secretary' in CDVEC. The data collection and interpretation process are discussed in

relation to the research question.   The data analysis process involved three different phases that are discussed in the following section of this chapter.

5.2   Step 1 – Phase 1 -Interviews with School Secretaries, Principals and other Stakeholders

The first phase of the data analysis process involved analysing each stage of the data from steps 1 to 4 as described in the research sequence in (p.69) of chapter four. The second phase of the research presented the findings from the first phase of interviews to the senior official of Impact Trade Union as outlined in step 5 of the research sequence. The third phase of the research presented the findings of all interviews as outlined in step 6 of the research sequence to the senior academic member of CDVEC Management.

Research Question - "What is the role and Impact of the School Secretary in the CDVEC Education System"?

The following research questions were asked to school secretaries, principals and other stakeholders as outlined from steps 1 to 4 (p69.). For the purpose of triangulation they are included at this stage of the analysis. In order to ascertain how the 'school secretary' assisted stakeholders and how they could better assist them for the future they were asked to describe their role and what improvements they would like to see. The researcher felt this question was necessary in order that the 'school secretary' could gain a better understanding of their work and how they could better assist them in carrying out the education process.

Question 1 - How do you feel about your Role?

This question was asked to 'school secretaries' in CDVEC and in the comparative study in New York.   Walting and James (2007) describe how each interpretation of data builds a picture. Bryman and Bell (2003) discuss how researchers using DA present information by uncovering interpretative repertories, which presents a unique view to many different aspects of how school secretaries and stakeholders perceive the role (Fearfull, 2005).

Summary: School secretaries/administrators referred to how they are the '*first port of call*' or the '*cogs in the wheel*' for students, staff and the general public and how they felt that the school could not run without them.

> *"I just think that the 'school secretary' is a huge umbrella name for the person that is doing the job at the cold face, the front line"*. *(SM)*

They referred to how this was evident if they were only out for a day. They referred to the '*multi-facet*' nature of their role in terms of providing an '*administrative*'' service to the school or by '*assisting*' the principal, and other academic staff in their role. This would concur with one 'school secretary' in New York who referred to the many '*facets*' of the role. They also made reference to the '*deadlines required for Head Office*' illustrated in fig.1.7 (p. 13) or providing letters that students or parents may require "*a letter for the HSC or their passport or whatever*"

They made reference to their '*public service*' role and how they do their '*utmost*' in the most '*professional*' and '*mannerly*' way to deal with the requests from the general public (Trachman, 1993). One 'school secretary' described their '*knowledge*' and '*information*' role in terms of the information they are required to know and give back to the public

> *"I think from our point of view as 'administrators' we give the people more knowledge walking away from the counter than they actually come in for"*.   *(SN1)*

Another 'secretary' referred to how there was no '*job description*' for the role

> "*it just depends on what you are given and that can be very demanding*".   *(SE)*

Reference was made to their high level of *skills, a*nd *qualifications* required to carry out the role and their '*commitment*' and '*dedication*' to the '*mission of the school*' and '*overall mission*' of CDVEC'.

> " *I think we are a skilled group of workers who have applied ourselves to achieve the best potential of the school*". *(SI)*

To describe the '*caring*' side of their role one 'secretary' commented on their wide and varied '*clientele*' that can take the form of '*getting assistance*' for the student with a splinter in their thumb or the student who is very '*upset*' before an exam. One 'school secretary' in New York commented on how she loved helping children and loved secretarial work but above all she loved helping people feel better in themselves (Casanova, 1991).

Reference was also made to their '*financial*', '*business*', '*teamwork*' and '*middle management*' role when one senior administrator stated, "*when I am out of the office at a meeting, on college 'business' or at the 'bank', I can have 'confidence' of the 'teamwork' performed in the school office*" (SN1).

School secretaries in New York made reference of how proud they were of the '*licence*' they hold which is specific to the New York area where they are seen as '*pedagogical professionals*'.

> "*I feel that my role is a professional role. As a 'school secretary', I feel that I make a big impact on the school setting to the administration and to the students and the parents of New York City Education*". *(SP2)*

They also made reference to the long hours of study involved in obtaining the credits to get the licence. The minutes of CDVEC from 1930 to 1980 makes reference to the '*high qualification*' entry requirements for clerical/administrative staff.

***Question 2* – Do you believe the 'school secretary' has an impact in the education system?**

This question was addressed to school secretaries, principals and all stakeholders to ascertain whether or not they believed the 'school secretary' had an impact in the education system. This question stemmed from the researcher's own philosophical worldview of how she felt her role as a 'school secretary' in a very busy college had an impact on the education system and she was anxious to find out how other 'school secretaries' and stakeholders felt.

Summary: The phrases used by 'school secretaries' in CDVEC varied from a confident "*one hundred per cent*", "*there is an impact*" to a more hesitant "*I think we are, we are a source of communication*". School secretaries addressed this question by referring to the huge amount of work they did and believed this was only realised when they were not there. One secretary commented on the need for all 'school secretaries' to "*shut up shop for the day*" and it might then be realised the impact or importance of their role. Another secretary described their impact in terms of having to '*catch up*' on their work after being out for a day.

Principals believed that 'school secretaries' definitely had an impact in the education system but not in the same way that enabled the delivery of the '*curriculum*' to the student. In analysing the views of the different principals the researcher found how the '*context*' of each answer to this question was similar but at the same time '*unique*' from the many different angles the question was answered (Bryman and Bell, 2003, p. 395).

Reference was made to how there was an impact when the office was '*running smoothly*' and how this impact varied from adding to the '*culture*' or impacting on the '*ethos'* of the school in terms of the way the student is '*valued*' and how this could be a '*barrier*' to the student returning to the college if they did not get the first initial positive response. This would concur with the views of Persaud (2005, p.1)

> ….for this community to be served efficiently, student services must include a staff that is capable of rendering services adequately and appropriately to current and potential students, parents and families.

Another principal described how their impact was not the same as the teacher but to the person who holds the '*operation*' together that everybody draws from. Another principal saw the role falling into two categories their '*informational and co-ordination*' role for; a) the school, b) Head Office, c) DES and d) other bodies. This would concur with the description given by another principal who saw the role as 'three dimensional' for; a) the school, b) Head Office and c) the Community.

Distinction was made by one principal between the '*admissions and administrative function*' in the school and the '*relationship role*' with teachers. An analysis of the Rochford (2002) review distinguished between the three different categories of schools in the VEC system where the '*admissions*' function related to Further Education colleges. Another principal referred to the '*supportive role*' of the 'school secretary' that was very much dependent on the' *leadership role* ' of the principal (Casanova, 1991), Trachman (1993) and Persaud (2005).

One 'school secretary' in New York described how they are a vital part of the school system because they had access to all aspects of the system.

> *"We are responsible for the children's records and everything primarily that is related to a child. We deal with the parents on a day- to- day-basis. The staff population, personally we are responsible for all aspects of their personal files for every staff member in our building".* *(P3)*

Attwood (2008) chairperson of the school of educational administration described how education administration is viewed as something that only happens in the classroom and the importance of it in the school office where it can contribute to the smooth running of the school. One co-ordinator and one disability officer commented "*there is a role for everyone*", if the admin staff were not there the '*stuff*' needed would just not be there. Others felt their impact was indirect in terms of their '*in-depth knowledge*' of the systems' and the '*informational role*' provided.

School secretaries commented on the '*assistance*' provided to them by the 'maintenance staff' in the college. Principals made reference to the '*maintenance staff*' together with 'school secretaries' as '*frontline*' staff and first point of contact for people coming into the college. Two members of the maintenance staff interviewed felt that their '*input*' was not required. They felt this was a pity because the Porter and Assistant Porter opened the college in the morning and were the last out in the evening and knew what was happening. Jarrett (2008) advises of the need to be cognizant of the 's*oft data*' that comes from their own workers and managers conversing about what they are seeing in the marketplace.

One member of the 'maintenance staff' commented on how they did not feel they had an impact that they were just following orders. He/she referred to the short notice given for events happening in the college that they were involved in and the need for '*forward planning*' to assist them in their role.

> *"it is not seen as professional if we don't know"* *(OM1)*

Another felt they did have an impact on the running of the school because of the feedback they got on how '*friendly*' they are when they meet people and the way they '*treat*' them.

Another disability officer commented on how in their observations whilst in the office the number of 'students' who came in and out for '*support*' and how they were treated and how everything was done to '*facilitate*' them. He/She also commented on how at the same time the office had teachers coming in and asking for several things to be done.

> "*There is a huge support going on that maybe isn't recognised you know*"   *(OD1)*

Casanova (1991) described in her observations of six 'school secretaries' the number of tasks performed by them in any one twenty-minute period.

Question 3 - How has the role changed over the last decade?

This question was asked to investigate how the role had changed over the past decade. The pilot study highlighted how schools had become much busier places, there was a change in student population, the introduction of education legislation, changes in the curriculum, development of policy documents, new agencies, new technology and much more. The researcher interested in finding out from a larger sample what was happening and where all this change was coming from and how it had impinged on the role of the 'school secretary' and other stakeholders.

Fearful (2005, pp. 138-139) described the '*pessimist view*' that saw 'clerks' as having little agency in their roles as opposed to the '*optimistic view*' that saw the evolution of '*record keeping*' and its links with maintaining '*inter*' and '*intra*' organisational accountability. The researcher using a constant

comparative method of analysis as described by (Hunter-Lowe, 2007) found that there were significant themes emerging in relation to the changes experienced to include (See Appendix O for full Analysis).

- Realisation that we are in a new '*modern era*' – the 21st Century
- Information Technology – Networking of Systems Across Departments
- Change in Student Population – Adult Students/Multi-Cultural Society
- Development of Further Education Sector – Two distinct sides '*admissions*' and '*administrative*'
- Increased workload due to many new projects that CDVEC has engaged in
- New Areas of Accountability and Responsibility and increased legislation
- An awareness of the changes that have not happened in relation to the rolling out of the '*financial system*' to all schools, equal rights for administrative staff on CID contracts and more frequent up-dating of the '*intranet*' system

Question 4 – What's important to you in your role?

This question was asked of 'school secretaries' to find out what was important to them in their role. This question was based on a research of the literature on 'school secretaries' in the USA from the observation study of Casanova (1991) who found that 'school secretaries' pride themselves of being involved in the '*education process*' of students.

Summary: The phrases used to answer this question went from "*to do a good job*", *"keep the principal and staff happy"(SI)*, *"being part of a team" (SM)*,*"nice working environment"(SE)*, "*the role itself, the knowledge we*

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have and give back to people" (SN2), "*job satisfaction particularly when a task is complicated*"(*SI*). School secretaries in New York commented; *"we like to help"* (*P1*), *"It is challenging, it is rewarding, servicing the children, seeing to their needs and that they come first"(P4). "We try and calm down everybody before it gets a real big problem"(P3).*

Question 5 – How do you describe the role?

The Rochford Review (2002, p, 51) states that there is no standard job specification for 'school secretaries'. It found that duties can vary according to school priorities or approach at scheme level to issues such as decentralisation of administrative functions/processes to schools. Casanova (1991) found in her research that the role of the school secretary was very different to that described in the job descriptions she analysed.

The researcher hoped that this question would provide information from many sources as to the content of the role that could provide for future job descriptions or a review study. She parcelled together many descriptions provided by all stakeholders (Bryman and Bell, 2003) that are included in Appendix P.

The list of duties compiled would concur with the Rochford Review (2002) who described how there were three different categories of schools in the CDVEC system and how the duties carried out by the administrative staff differed as a result. This was further contextualised by one principal who described how schools differed in size and in scope and in their place in the community *(PG).*

***Question 6 – Do you feel the title 'school secretary' adequately describes
the role*, or what term would best describe the role?**

Administrative staff appointed to schools and colleges in CDVEC are not
appointed as 'school secretaries'. The staff handbook (2007) describes the
grading structure from Grade 111 to APO level. Depending on the
wholetime enrolments in the school the administrative staff are appointed to
grades between I11 and VI.   The pilot study revealed that at local level in
schools where there was a second level enrolment they were referred to as
'secretaries' and in colleges of further education they were referred to as
administrators. It also identified that the title 'school secretary' did not
adequately describe the role performed by administrative staff working in
the schools and colleges. The researcher was anxious to find out from a
larger study how stakeholders viewed the title or what title would best
describe the role.

Summary: It was generally agreed that the title 'school secretary' was seen
as "*outdated* "and "*old fashioned*" and did not adequately describe the
duties performed by the administrative staff in the schools and colleges of
CDVEC. It was further acknowledged that in Further Education colleges
administrative staff were not called 'school secretaries' but '*administrators*'.
Attwood (2008) described how in England the terms 'administrator, 'school
secretary' and 'bursar' are interchangeable, but generally the head of the
department is the bursar who takes control of finances. Under the bursar are
the 'administrators' "*secretary is considered an old fashioned name, we use
'school administrator' throughout our work*".

One 'school secretary' commented on how the title of 'school secretary'
described the role better than what she was appointed as Grade IV Assistant
Staff Officer' "*at least they know my title*"*(SI).* This would concur with the
findings from the interviews with 'school secretaries' in New York who
were proud of their title "*we are pedagogical professionals, we have a*

licence". The following views of one principal interviewed would concur with the views of one guidance counsellor in New York

> *"I think it is a throwback to when they were literally writing letters and nowadays everybody writes their own and anybody who is IT literate does most of their own writing anyway, but there is a huge 'administrative' role and so I don't think the word 'secretary' is adequate"(PG)*

One principal agreed their was a need for a change but was not sure what title would be suitable and did not like titles with officers or grading structures and saw them as '*hierarchically*' . This principal did not agree with the title 'administrator' and believed this title encompassed a much wider role to include the principal, deputy principal, senior management team and the administrative staff. This would not concur with the views of one other principal who had only one administrative staff member in the college but felt that if there was another administrative person would prefer the title administrator.

> *" I would feel the title 'administrator' would be more appropriate because they would be 'managing' and have more discretion in the role"*   *(PJ)*

Another principal explained how they had a discussion on the title when renewing their system and how the title '*office manager*' was raised as a possibility and explained why it was not used

> *"if you are in charge of something and there was grief coming your way, you can't really say it is not all my fault here, I am doing my best – well you are the manager you have got to manage it".* *(PK)*

One teacher described how they use the title 'school secretary' but commented on how they did not see them as 'secretaries' but part of the school team. Another teacher described how there was an awful lot more than just secretarial work.

"from petty cash, to accounts, to ordering, I mean that is strictly not 'secretarial' work. I think the whole idea of 'administrators' would be more suitable".   *(04)*

Question 7 – What qualities or skills do you feel the school secretary needs to carry out their role?

The Rochford Review (2002) outlines a draft statement on the duties associated with the 'school secretary'. It does not make any reference to the '*interpersonal*' skills required to carry out the role. A research of the literature carried out by Persaud (2005) among the many other skills required by those involved in front-line services stressed the importance of '*communication*' skills. Casanova (1993) identified '*interpersonal skills*' as the most important. Trachman (1993) referred to the need for the 'school secretary' to be able to '*multi-task*' and referred to the many '*different hats*' they wear in the role that is required to meet the needs of current and potential students, parents and families.

Summary: Principals commented on how they saw the '*interpersonal skills*' as most important for the role. They also commented on the IT skills required that went far beyond the basic IT skill sets to more sophisticated forms of presenting data and interpreting financial reports. Three school principals commented on the need to understand what the school was about "*something about the methodology of education and what we are trying to achieve"(PH)*. Another principal referred to it in terms of understanding what the school was trying to achieve *(PK)*. And the third principal referred to the need for 'school secretaries' "*to busy themselves and read up on what the school had to offer" (PF)*. School secretaries also highlighted the following list of skills required

- Communication
- People

- Public Service

- Dealing with Awkward Parents

- Dealing with Awkward Students

- Dealing with Staff

- Patience and Commitment

- Reception Skills

- Special Needs

School Secretaries in the USA added to the list to include

- Caring first of all

- Be quick and accurate

- Everyday secretarial skills

- A lot of commonsense

Fearfull (2005, p.143) described how using an interpretive methodology allowed her unpack the notion of 'commonsense' in her study. A school secretary in New York stated

> *"you have to be pretty accurate and quick because you don't have a lot of time to spend doing things over. You have to get it done and get it out, because you spend much time on helping everyone else".* *(P1)*

One of the three teachers interviewed in the group interview described the important role the 'school secretary' played in the settling in of students, particularly the '*first year students*' *(A2)* and noticed how they like to go up to the school office. Principals and teachers also commented on how the 'school secretary' assisted '*new comers*' starting in the school and helping them settle in.

Question 8 – In view of the role 'school secretaries/administrators' play in education and the skills required to do so – do you think administration is a specialist field?

In view of the number of years of experience of working in the role and the significant changes experienced by the researcher particularly since the enactment of the 1998 Education Act, the Vocational Amendment Act (2001) and the Acts that followed she was of the belief that the role now required much more specialist knowledge than in previous years. McDonald (2008) described this era as the most enacted period in the history of education. McGarr (2008) referred to the shift that had taken place in the perception of VEC's from the poor cousins in education where they are seen today as one of the primary pillars upholding the governments national development plan for a highly skilled workforce to operate a knowledge economy.

The chairman of the School of Educational Administration in the UK described the specialist education, training, certification and up to date publications to assist school administrators in their role. Trachman (1993) produced a three hundred and sixty seven page survival guide for school secretary's in order to assist them carry out their role. Casanova (1991) described how she saw the role of a 'school secretary' as very different to the role of a '*business secretary*' in terms of the varied clientele they dealt with. Persaud (2005) referred to how those in the students services department could result in the student enrolling or remaining in the college. This would concur with the views of one teacher/co-ordinator who described how 'school secretaries' through their '*advice*' and '*ear*' to listen to students and with advice from their tutor resulted in them remaining in the college *(O4)*.

Summary: The following phrases and quotes describe the language used by 'school secretaries' that varied from a '*very specialist role*', 'to a hugely

specialised role' to '*from a Head Office point of view not seen in a very professional light*'. Another 'school secretary' commented '*o'h definitely, most definitely*'. A school secretary in New York commented " *yes indeed because we are the first person you usually see when you come into the school, we set the tone for the school"(P5)*. One teacher from the group interviewed commented on how it was such a specialist nature that it could prevent 'school secretaries' from moving into other sectors of employment *(A4)*. Teachers/co-ordinators made reference to the huge amount of '*knowledge*' required to do the job and how this knowledge assisted them in their role. A guidance counsellor described how they could have confidence in the 'school secretary' in the information provided to stakeholders because they had all the "*information at their fingertips" (O2)*.

One principal commented, *"you see it is not a specialist role because it is not a narrow role"(PG)*. The principal referred to how if you were in a third level college you may be in admissions, or you may be in finance and you would be specialising. The views of another principal would concur with those of Casanova (1991) who referred to how in any other situation you have a defined set of customers but the 'school secretary' has to deal with a very varied set of customers. He/she described the role as "*most peculiar really"(PE)*. Another principal described how they did not see it as a 's*pecialised role*' like that in the medical sector and commented on the ability required to interpret medical language in prescriptions. He/she also commented on the fact that if the person was operating at a higher level that required specific knowledge "*in terms of Health and Safety or advising at a Board of Management on a Section 29 procedure, or taking on the Garda Vetting forms for Students on various PLC courses"* felt the administrative person would then be operating at a higher level in an '*advisory role*' that would require specialist knowledge *(PK)*.

The above would concur with the views of one other principal who referred to the need for a 'senior role' to assist in '*building matters*' and in making

other decisions that would '*free up*' the principal to allow them deal with the '*leadership functions*' of the role *(PJ)*. The researcher observed in her visit to a large vocational school in New York how the '*Business Manager*' looked after all 'school budgets' in relation to the overall spending in the college that allowed the principal look after the '*curriculum*' and concentrate on their '*leadership*' role. This would concur with the views of one Principal when referring to the support given by the 'school administrators' in the college *(PL)*. The four models of leadership discussed in the literature review recommended for school leaders included; *distributed*, *collaborative*, *visionary* and t*ransformational* to assist them in their role and at the same time challenge and stretch all individuals involved in the education process.

Question 9 – The pilot study undertaken highlighted the need for better Communication, Collaboration and Training in order to carry out the role more effectively. How do you think it could be improved?

The findings from the pilot study indicated the need for better communication and collaboration for 'school secretaries' to be '*kept in the loop*' on what was happening in order to carry out their roles more effectively and feel part of the team. They also felt that this could be improved by attending some part of the 'staff meetings' that was normally only for academic staff. This question was put to all stakeholders to ascertain the views of a larger study. Persaud, (2005, p.2) highlighted that the problem at RMEC was with the quality of communication of information provided to clients, specifically, '*depth*', '*breadth*', '*timeliness*', and the '*manner*' in which information was made available and delivered had been noted as in need of improvement.

The pilot study also highlighted the lack of training in place for 'school secretaries' to meet the challenges they were being faced with. Persaud (2005, p. 4) commented on how there was no '*systematic*' or regular

ongoing '*training programme*' established for student services employees whose roles and responsibilities included '*customer service*' and '*interactive encounters*' with students. She commented on how' '*finding*' and '*nurturing human talent*' was a key ingredient to long-term organisational success. The reports of the EGFSN (2007) (Expert Group on Future Skills Needs) and the National Partnership Forum (2008) highlighted a low level of in-house training for employees.

Summary: The discussion that took place on this question was divided into two areas

- **Communication**
    - Open Day between administrative staff in the schools, centres and Head Office
    - Re-introduction of the PMDS (Performance Management Development System)
    - Attendance at some part of the staff meeting to be kept in the loop on what is happening

- **Training**
    - IT – More sophisticated Training
    - Finance
    - Marketing
    - Public Relations
    - Middle-Management
    - Student Enrolments
    - Teamwork
    - Multi-Cultural
    - Special Needs
    - Understanding Methodologies in Education
    - Workshops

A requirement for school secretaries to operate in schools and colleges in New York State is their pedagogical licence that is obtained through examination (Ervolina, 2008). Attwood (2008) described how one 'school secretary' who undertook the Certificate in Education Administration course commented on how it gave her great '*insight*' into the running of the school office.

Principals referred to how a lot of the issues discussed in this research could be addressed through the Performance Management Development System (PMDS) that no longer existed. One principal made reference to how '*collaboration*' would then follow *(PG)*. Other principals commented on how this would improve '*communication*'. This would concur with the views one 'school secretary' who saw the exercise in a positive way and how '*communication*' did improve and felt it a pity that it was no longer in operation *(SJ)*. Three other 'school secretaries' saw it as a '*box ticking exercise*' with no major improvement from it *(SN1,2,&3)*. School secretaries in New York all referred to the training programmes that were put in place for them through the work of their UFT Chairperson Ervolina (2008).

Question 10 – Are 'school secretaries' prepared to meet the forecast of the IVEA (2008) report (A New Age of Challenge and Opportunity for VEC's discusses the confluence of developments that were taking place in the education system and how they will affect the Vocational Education sector) that estimates eighty-four per cent of the up-skilling prescribed in the national skills strategy of some 500,000 people by the year 2020 will lie within the VEC remit?

This question was put to 'school secretaries' and principals to ascertain how the IVEA (2008) forecast would affect the 'school secretary', whether they were prepared for it and what training was needed. At the time of interviews in 2009 schools and colleges in CDVEC were experiencing a huge increase in the number of applications for enrolment on courses. This was also a time when the country was in the '*depths*' of a worldwide recession that had resulted in massive unemployment.

Summary: School principals did not see this affecting the 'school secretary' because schools were limited to the number of enrolments they could take in " *when we are full, we are full" (PG).* Another principal commented "*I don't think that schools are thinking that far ahead at the moment" (PH).* One principal described how much of what was probably being referred to in this report was already happening under the Skills VEC and BTEI programmes, *"it would mean providing shorter term courses and the small bit we do here is not done by the school secretary"(PK).*

Two 'school secretaries' made reference to the great structures in place in VEC's and their great philosophy that is seen through the education services they provide *"it would be more experience for the 'school secretary', there are good structures in the VEC" (SI)* and *"the VEC has a great philosophy and the great services they provide" (SM).* This would re-enforce the writings of Moriarty (2009) in his foreword in Cooke (2009) where he refers

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to the '*visionary*' missionaries who paved the pathways for those involved in vocational education today.

Question 11 – With secretaries, principals and all stakeholders the areas of Networking and Professional Development for 'school secretaries' was discussed. How important do you think this is for them?

Casanova (1991) traces a history of continuous professional development for 'school secretaries' in the USA since the mid 1930s. Ervolina (2008) in the USA and Attwood (2008) in the UK stress the importance of networking and professional development for school secretaries. Working as an administrative person in one of CDVEC's schools the researcher experienced an increase in the amount of electronic mail coming through highlighting the '*continuous professional development*' in place for academic staff. She was of the opinion that this should also be happening for school administrative staff. She wanted to find out how her colleagues and other stakeholders felt.

Summary: All principals refereed to the need for 'school secretaries' to network as a more cohesive group "*putting their stamp on it*"*(PJ)*. One principal commented on the '*wealth of knowledge*' available in the system among 'school secretaries' particularly those with '*long service*' and how principals have rang for '*professional advice*'. He /she commented on how they would use that resource and recommend that the 'VEC' and 'school secretaries' '*tap into that knowledge'* and use it *(PE)*.

Principals made reference to how they are organised as a group themselves and the benefits from it. Teachers commented on how they are provided with opportunities to network through in-service training and subject departments. The disability officer indicated how they provided training for all categories of staff through the National Learning Network (NLN) and how they advise principals to encourage their staff to participate.

Attwood (2008) referred to his experiences as a teacher and senior lecturer in education and who had now moved into business. He described how he was aware of the contrast in the way '*businesses*' were administered and the way '*schools*' were administered and from this he saw the need for '*professional development*' for school administrators "*in the UK the government put a lot of resources into training bursars, but had done little for everyone else in the school office*". He made reference to the use of networking and commented, "*it is not used and developed as much as I would like it to be. Administrators don't communicate with each other beyond their own school*". He described how the SEA (School of Educational Administration) was the only body that has some way of networking through the web site and news service it runs (Appendix J).

Question 12 – What are your views on the Rochford Review (2002) on the restructuring of administrative Grades in CDVEC?

The Rochford Review (2002) on the re-structuring of administrative posts in CDVEC allocated ninety-six per cent of the up-gradings above that of Grade IV to the administrative grades in CDVEC Head Office. Rochford (2002) recommended that an individual study in line with the developments in the Further Education Sector in VEC's should be carried out. Nine years later this has not happened. The researcher wanted to find out the views of 'school secretaries' and principals to put them to the senior official of IMPACT Trade Union and a senior member of the academic staff in CDVEC Head Office.

Summary: School secretaries made reference to how in some instances the posts in their schools were up-graded from a Grade 111 to Grade IV and referred to the fact that the senior position in a school should be at least that of a Grade V to reflect the responsibility that the post carried. The following describes the comments of principals interviewed "*schools got nothing out of Rochford*"*(PE)*, "*no the structures do not meet the demands*

of the role"(PG), " totally wrong and lost sight of the core business of education, the tail wagging the dog really"(PH). "It was not of benefit to the education business, which is the teaching and learning. It was of benefit to the administrative structure"(PE). "Schools got what was asked for, not what Rochford recommended"(PJ).

Research Question 13 – Is there anything else you, as a participant in the research would like to highlight?

This question was asked to all stakeholders. The researcher felt this was a very important question. Apart from the learning curve it provided for the researcher it also provided the opportunity for the participants to discuss anything in relation to the research question that they felt was important.

Summary: One school principal referred to the need for the researcher to look at the '*role of the school*' because it differs from school to school. How the role conducts itself very much determines the role of the 'school secretary' and the recognition they get (PG). Another Principal referred to the great mix of young and old in the college, the mixing of people with disability and ability. *"A great mix and great life and generally people are very happy" (PF)*. The Education Training Officer looking after training for students with special needs stressed the importance of the progression route to 'higher level awards' for his/her students *(OT)*. This would concur with the findings in the EGFSN (2007) forecast that if there is '*no change*' in policy on '*up-skilling*' there would be an over '*supply*' of qualifications at lower levels and not enough at the higher level end. Teachers all made reference to the need for extra '*administrative staff* ' to ease the burden on the '*administrators*' in the college. One teacher referred to the need of an actual '*school secretary*' to carry out the routine '*secretarial*' tasks and allow the 'administrators' concentrate on the '*administrative*' functions of their role *(O4)*. One principal made reference to how everybody is a

'*teacher*' in the sense that students '*observe*' and '*learn*' from what they see others doing *(PL)*.

School secretaries in CDVEC all commented on how they enjoyed their role, being part of a team and working with the students. They referred to the need for an '*Open Day*' to be arranged between themselves and staff at Head Office, a visit from the HR officer from time to time, more training and recognition of the role. School secretaries interviewed in the USA stated *"I enjoy my job", "I love my job", "I love working with the students, I think they inspire us"*.

The findings from this first step of analysis are presented in phase 2 and phase 3 interviews with the senior official from IMPACT trade union and the senior academic member of CDVEC Head Office.

5.3   Analysis Step 2 – Comparative Study with School Secretaries in New York.

Step 1 of the analysis in the previous section of this chapter includes the analysis and interpretations of the questions asked to 'school secretaries' interviewed in New York. The following section of this chapter provides an analysis of the visit to a vocational school, attendance at a staff development day and attendance at the 'school secretary' of the year awards ceremony.

5.3.1   Visit to Vocational School

The design of the study for the visit to a large vocational school in New York was based on the observation study of Casanova (1991) who compiled field notes directly after her visit to the sites of the schools where the school secretary worked. This included details of who she met, what they did, their

personality, qualifications, the layout of the building, the culture experienced and their relationships with their principal.

The field notes from the researcher's visit that were recorded the same day described the very busy nature of schools with students changing classes on corridors, offices with phones constantly ringing and staff moving briskly to get to class.

> The school currently at this time has one thousand five hundred students. They will be getting a further five hundred students in September.   (NY-2/6/09)

One 'school secretary' in the college brought the researcher on a tour of the college. They first entered the office of the Principal's Secretary.

> The office was like most of CDVEC school offices. Her office a general office with the Principal's office off hers.   (NY – 2/06/09)

The following entry illustrates how school secretaries in this school specialise in a particular area of work in the college and have their titles clearly written above their door. It also illustrates the layout of offices and the number of school secretaries employed and how there are receptionist staff and additional administrative staff employed to carry out other routine duties.

> We walked over the corridor to a workstation where I was introduced to two receptionists; they worked with the Purchasing and Payroll Secretaries. …. Introduced me to them as we walked into …… office where on top of the door was Purchasing Secretary and next door to her the Payroll Secretary.   (02/06/09)

The researcher recorded how the description given by the Purchasing Secretary on the system she operated for purchasing appeared quite similar to the SUN system operated for purchasing by the administrative staff in the

schools and colleges of CDVEC. The Purchasing Secretary described how she does all the ordering for the school with two thousand pupils, eighty-eight teachers and support staff and how she has to send a copy of the order to the District Office of Education (DOE) officer downtown, which is similar to what happens in CDVEC where a copy of the order is sent to Head Office. The Purchasing Secretary described how the DOE then sign off on invoices and the researcher described how in her own college the principal signs off on requisitions, invoices and orders. Another CDVEC school principal stated

> "The teacher writes a requisition, I sign off on the requisition, I would never do an order. I see the requisition as correct. The school secretary will see the administration process of the pricing structure and value for money is correct and only when all that is done will it come back to me for signing. You should have a system of checks and balances of which they are a part of. They may not see that because nobody has ever told them. You are part of the checks and balances for public money." *(PE)*

The Payroll Secretary was not available and the Guidance Secretary explained how she looked after all the paperwork for payment to the school personnel. She described how the cheques were printed and delivered to her for distribution.

Fig. 2.11 (p. 37) of this study provides information on the determination of administrative posts in the Rochford Review (2002) that did not take into account schools with an evening school enrolment. One school secretary interviewed in CDVEC with a student population of two hundred and fifty full-time day students and one thousand part-time evening students described how she does all the admin work.

> "I do the admin side – I do all the enrolments, I take in all the money, I do all the refunds, everything, part-time teacher payments, everything to do with administration". *(SJ)*

The researcher was then brought to the student registration department where the Student Registration Secretary explained how she entered all the student information on the database. She described the system where they have students transferring from other schools and how the requirement of the transcripts has to be in place before the student can be entered on the system. This would compare with the system in place in CDVEC colleges where student enrolments include transfers of students from other schools and the information required for the CIMS student database system. One school principal interviewed referred to the '*million pieces*' *(PK)* of information the 'school secretary' must input for the production of the October Returns for the DES.

The researcher was introduced to the Guidance Counsellor who referred to her Guidance Secretary as her '*life-line*'. She also commented on how the title '*secretary*' confers the idea of a woman typing a letter and does not describe the role adequately. This would concur with the views of school secretaries, principals and other stakeholders interviewed in CDVEC.

The researcher was then brought upstairs to the Resource/Remedial Secretary who shared the office with the Resource Co-ordinator. She described how there were three hundred students in the school needing resource hours and how some of these could be one to one or in groups. She showed the researcher a form they used for the application to the DOE for resource hours, which was practically identical to the form used in the CDVEC system. She also described how all the forms were filed in her office.

The researcher described how in her own school this function was carried out by the guidance counsellor/principal and the only input she had was in terms of word-processing the handwritten form for which she had a template. The researcher was also introduced to two other office personnel who were assisting with secretarial work in this department. A guidance

counsellor interviewed in CDVEC who looks after the application for resource hours for students commented on the great benefit a 'secretary' would be for him/her where at a special meeting chaired by him/her has also to take the minutes of the meeting and how this would allow him/her participate more fully at the meeting.

The researcher visited another office where the secretary shared the office with the Business Manager who looked after budgets. She had a very varied role that looked after the many needs of students, teacher requirements and security personnel. Many of the functions she described for example accident reports, phone issues, announcements, student attendance sheets, student payments, general letters, permit issues, bus trips, key replacements and computer issues are also carried out by school secretaries in CDVEC. The secretary referred to her desk as her 'work station' and the researcher observed the extreme pressure she was under while in the office and did not have time to spend talking. This would also compare with the field notes taken to describe the offices of 'school secretaries' interviewed in CDVEC and the reason for the researcher conducting many of the interviews during the Easter and Summer holiday times.

Following the tour of the college the researcher commenced the interview with the guidance secretary who had already given up so much of her time. During the course of the interview the secretary had to answer the phone this was similar in the field notes documented of the interviews carried out with school secretaries in CDVEC. The secretary explained all the people she had introduced the researcher to and questions asked to school secretaries in CDVEC were also asked and for triangulation purposes are included in step one of the analysis.

The principal suggested to the guidance secretary that she should bring the researcher to see the workshops. On their way the researcher visited the school library and was excited about this as they had just been sanctioned a

library in her college.   She observed the glass cabinets with samples of students' work and trophies. She also observed in the two workshops visited how in one they were working on lawnmower engines and in the second constructing a fully functional house in a wooden framework. The workshops were similar to the Engineering and Woodwork workshops in her own college.

Summary: The descriptions outlined from the field notes above of the visit to the vocational school in the USA found that the duties and functions performed by school secretaries were practically identical to those performed by school secretaries in CDVEC. The culture experienced in the school was also very similar: a very friendly staff willing to share their experiences despite the very busy environment, with phones constantly ringing, visitors to the office and the hustle and bustle on the corridors.

The artefacts displayed both on the corridors and the paperwork in the offices were very similar to those observed in the schools and colleges in CDVEC. The layout of classrooms and workshops were also identical. The differences were in how the 'school secretaries' specialised in their department areas with their titles above their door. One school principal interviewed in one of the larger schools in CDVEC outlined how the 'school secretary' has to be able to perform all the functions required in the school office. In smaller schools where the school secretary is on their own they perform all the administrative functions in their college.

5.3.2   Attendance at Staff Development Day

The second day of the study in New York involved the attendance at a professional development day for all chapter members of UFT to include teaching staff, para-professionals, social workers, physical professionals and 'school secretaries'. Bryman and Bell (2003) describe how discourse analysis is more suitable in business research because it includes the

analysis of documentation. The agenda for the staff development day states how" *this workshop will provide you with a 'continued' understanding of the "tools for the Job" to help ensure you have a safe and secure work environment*". The agenda also outlined how the morning session included talks from a Chief Operating Officer from the New York Police Department, The Director of Staff and the Director of Safety and Health at UFT to speak on the following topics.

- Understanding Individualised Education Plans (IEP) & Special Education
- Emergency Preparedness
- School Safety Planning

For the afternoon session members were divided into their various chapters. The agenda for the 'school secretaries' chapter included:

- A guide for Gang Prevention given by the Assistant Chief Commanding officer of the 'School Safety Division
- Managing Stress – UFT Facilitator from the Teacher Centre
- Swine Flu – A Doctor from the School Safety Division
- Documentation required by the District Officer of Education (DOE)

The agenda also outlined how both sessions included a questions and answers section for all chapters of UFT. During the course of the morning session the Chairperson had selected four school secretaries for the researcher to interview. They are included in step one of the analysis.

Summary: In her report to the Chairperson of the School Secretary's chapter the researcher stated:

> "An invitation by the Chairperson to attend the Staff development day was another very valuable exercise on the all important aspects

of Health and Safety from an educational perspective. I found every presentation very relevant to my own work as well as gaining new and valuable information to enhance my knowledge in this area. I was provided with the opportunity of learning about and meeting many of the partners involved in providing a Health and Safety plan to the schools in the five boroughs of New York State. I also felt very privileged to meet many of the school secretaries present and be part of the learning group there that day"   (08/06/2009)

School Secretaries and other stakeholders in CDVEC spoke of the need for 'school secretaries' to organise themselves into a cohesive group. They also spoke of the need to have an open forum with administrative staff in Head Office where each could discuss their work in terms of how they could better assist one another.

5.3.3   School Secretary of the Year Awards

The final day of the study was the attendance at the UFT's 23[rd] Annual 'School Secretary' of the year Gala Awards Luncheon. The brochure for the day outlined how one 'school secretary' from each of the five boroughs of New York was nominated by their school to receive the award.   The following extract from the researcher's field notes written that evening provides a glimpse of what the day entailed.

> ….. introduced us to the Committee. She then took us downstairs to see the stand with the History of 'school secretaries'. It was so interesting – old records, forms, old photos of the founder of the chapter Goldie Colodny. We then went back upstairs and the reception started.   ….. was tremendous on the speeches and introduced all the guest speakers who all spoke about their role with UFT and introduced the 'school secretary' from their borough who was receiving the award. The school secretaries presentations were just amazing. Each how they spoke about their roles and about what is important to them.   (04/06/09)

Summary: Ervolina (2009) described how the chapter came into existence in the 1960s and how they were the first chapter or group to be affiliated with UFT. She described how in the 1920s the job of the 'school secretary' was done by teacher clerks, this would concur with the finings on the history of the role as described by Casanova (1991). An analysis of the research on the minutes of the committee meetings of CDVEC traced the administrative staff in place in the technical colleges since their foundation in 1930.

Spielberg (2009, p. 2) in her article the '*masters of multi-tasking*' reporting on the Gala drew attention to the opening remarks of Ervolina (2009) who stated

> "despite the many high tech changes in school offices, the secretary's role has not changed over time. We ensure every student is provided with a quality educational environment, provide core services, order supplies, monitor budgets, make sure everyone is paid, and do it all with phones ringing, questions being hurled at us and students crying".

The above would concur with the descriptions provided by 'school secretaries' interviewed in step 1 of this chapter.   Following her report to the Chairperson on the study the researcher described how she found it very difficult to find words to describe the School Secretaries Awards Luncheon.

> "it was just breathtaking and stepping into the function room was totally exhilarating. Congratulations to all involved in making this day such a success. Congratulations to all who received the awards and the very encouraging presentations they made. It makes it all so worthwhile of being part of this very special and caring profession. The beautiful '*plaques*' received will be forever the '*hallmarks*' for the 'secretaries', for their outstanding qualities and the role they play in the life of the schools and all those they serve"   08/06/09

Spielberg (2009, p. 4) reported how the researcher, a 'school secretary' and union member from Ireland doing research for a doctorate on the role of the 'school secretary' was among the guests of honour and O'Prey (2009) said "*although the school systems in Ireland and the States are different, we secretaries have far more in common than not*".

5.4   Analysis Step 3 – Interview with the Chairman of the School of Educational Administration

The findings from the analysis of this interview are also included in phase one of this chapter. The Chairman of the School of Education administration described how a lot of training was carried out for school bursar's who looked after 'school budgets' in the school but how little training was done for any other staff in the 'school office'. He described how the title of the school came about to reflect that the organisation would be focused on *'administration'* in the widest sense and not just on the work of the bursar. This would contrast with Gunter (2001, p. 89) who described the growth of the provision of courses in educational administration to support the learning process that was undertaken by teachers and post holders. The director explained how he himself had been a teacher and later a senior tutor who moved into *'business'* and was aware of the way *'businesses'* were administered and the way *'schools'* were administered. This would concur with Buckley and Monks (2008, p. 147) who described how a programme designed by DCU was both an educational and developmental experience for managers who are working in rapidly changing organisations.   The Chairman described how he saw the need for professional development for 'school administrators' and how the school was set up in 2004. The first students enrolled on the one year National Certificate of Educational Administration in 2005. A one-year Diploma in School Efficiency grew out of the need for progression from the National

Certificate course in 2010. This would address the forecast of the Expert Group report on the Future Skills Needs (EGFSN, 2007, p. 10) who described how if there was no policy change, educational attainment projections for 2020 would show a shortage of qualified professionals at NFQ Levels 6 and 7.

5.5   Analysis Step 4- Survey with Students

The survey forms were analysed in the same format as the research interviews with a key focus on language. The researcher was anxious to build up as many pictures as possible of the descriptions of how the 'school secretary' assists the student during their time in the college (Walting and James, 2007) in Briggs and Coleman (2007). Creswell (2009, p.151) advises of the need that the data analysis be presented in a serious of steps. This involved three steps. In step one the researcher analysed the nine research questions on a table that included the individual responses from each of the twenty-eight survey forms.

The second step of the analysis involved compiling all the responses to the nine questions on the twenty- eight survey forms. The final third step presented a brief action step of how the 'school secretary' assists the student during their time in the college. Bryman and Bell (2003, p 393) describes how discourse analysis is not just a mirror of the social world around us but in many ways plays a key role in producing that world. How we say things, our phrases, our emphases, the things we leave out, it is meant to accomplish certain effects in others. In so doing, we have an impact on others perceptions and understanding and as such on their and our reality. The following presents the action phrases of the responses to the research questions as outlined in Appendix L.

How secretary assists you while in College – Helps, Organises, Finds, Supplies, Stamps, Types, Gives Information, Registration, Timetables.

When applying for a place in the College – Helpful, Informative, Explanatory, Kind, Friendly, Diligent, Organised, Assists, Link, Key Person

Describe Role: Busy, Stressful, Hectic, Difficult, Important, Overworked, Efficient, Organised, Assists, Link, Key Person

Improvements: Be More Available, Office Open, Expand Services, More Accessible, More Photocopying Services, Delegate, More Responsibility.

Most Important Duties: dealing with questions, problems be quick, be there for people, maintain order, give information, timetables, telephone, letters, forms/photocopies, assists principal, first point of contact, facilities, record minutes

Does the Title School Secretary Describe Role: No does a lot more than people think, most definitely, school co-ordinator, administrator describes much better, *'outdated refers to an era that did not encompass as many facets of college life as today'*

What do you look for the School Secretary to do for you: Problems, Attendance, Form Filling, References, Letters, Rooms, Timetables, Change of details on the Computer, Photocopying, Appointments, Information, Notes Stamped, First Aid, Guidance, Documents, Applications, Grants, Pass on Messages to Tutors, Did not require anything.

Anything else you would like to add: Does a good job, thank you for your help throughout the year, Good to keep on top of things with new ideas, surprised at the volume of work and demanding nature of the role, diverse student body and teachers, which is additional to knowledge and technical skills, has to be above all *a people friendly person who gets on with students.*

The above would concur with the findings from all the interviews with other stakeholders and in the comparative study in New York and with the findings from the research of Casanova (1991) and the survival guide of Trachman (1993).

5.6   Analysis Step 5 - Phase 2 – Interview with Senior Official IMPACT Trade Union

The key findings from the analysis of the first four steps in phase one of the research analysis was presented in eight broad questions to the senior official from IMPACT Trade Union as outlined in the following section of this chapter. Each question categorised the findings into main themes.

Q1   What changes have been introduced into the work practice of the school secretary?

- An increase in workload
- Increase in report writing
- Increase in accountability- finance, record keeping
- Increase in education legislation, policy documents
- A colossal increase in paperwork from DES, FETAC, CDVEC, Head Office, Partnerships, Education Programmes/Funding
- Increase in information technology – e.mail and internet

Summary: The interviewee commented on how there were numerous queries coming in from members every day and was aware of this from travelling around VEC's in the country. Reference was made to the huge steps taken by VEC's in branching out into all kinds of different areas that were funded mostly from Europe.

> *"you know these kind of bolt on areas, and with those comes accountability and reports and figures and on-line computer systems, and I am hearing all the time about workers in the schools struggling to keep up with these issues".* *(A5)*

He/she also commented on the frustration members felt with computer systems provided that are not up to the standard and where no proper training had been provided. This would concur with the findings of EGFSN (2007) and Partnership (2008) who found that those involved in education did not have a good history of up-skilling their own staff.

The interviewee also made reference to how the 1998 Education Act had been pretty broad and the 2001 VEC Act which brought with them more and more strictures and reports and commented

> *"the Department of Education have farmed education out to the school and they expect that everyone is answerable and accountable to them and give them back the reports".* *(A5)*

He/she made reference to how the responsibility for all these new areas was left to the 'school secretary' and how this was gone totally unrecognised by anybody.

> *"you know you will see a 'school secretary' quite a low grade reporting ineffectively to an APO or Principal Officer in a Department for everything that happens, they are part of the baby link".* (A5)

The following statement made by the interviewee would bear witness to the need for better Public Service as outlined in the OECD (2008) report, the Public Service Reform (2010 –2014) report and the Croke Park Agreement (2010).

> *"the department has all its many sections and you could be working away dancing to the tune of one Principal Officer and then someone else wants something and a new set of deadlines in the empire of education, and he or she starts screaming down to the CEO of the VEC who starts screaming down to the school, change everything and chain yourself from that runaway horse to this runaway horse".*
> *(A5)*

Q2. **There is a need for broadening of the structures in schools and colleges to withstand the new developments and nature of the workload now undertaken by administrative staff. The Rochford Review (2002) recommended that an independent study be carried out in the schools and colleges and now eight years later has not happened. What are your views on this?**

Summary: The interviewee commented on how 'school secretaries' are no longer just reporting to the principal or deputy in the school where they are working

> *"they are reporting to the broader world both within their VEC and with other entities such as the DES, BETEC, FETAC, HETAC you name it, and obviously all the community groups that bolt on".* (A5)

He/she also commented on how the VEC's don't just stay in the narrow scope of what the department hands down to them, they keep broadening out and getting into other areas. He/she pointed out that with this comes complexities and problem solving that are above and beyond the grading of the administrative staff member in the school.

The interviewee made reference to how the researcher in her question spoke about the modest up-gradings for 'schools and colleges' in the Rochford Review (2002) and commented on the need to look at the time of the review.

> *"by the time the print went dry, so to speak it was completely out of date, that the world had moved another quantum leap at least".*
> *(A5)*

He/she agreed that the up-gradings in the schools and colleges were modest but acknowledged that what they did get was a framework, and the commitment to a review after Rochford (2002) had been implemented.

The interviewee described how in 2008 they had the terms of reference in place and an independent chairperson appointed to commence the process of another re-structuring process but that it never got to the stage where both sides could sit down and talk about it because

> *"at the same time the same clock was ticking that ripped a hole in the public finances and it was agreed to park the process until the time had passed that the public finances get back on track and we can talk about it again".*   *(A5)*

The interviewee made reference to how this involved another statistical review of sitting down and going through the statistical evidence that showed that the VEC sector both in its headquarters and in its schools had grown immeasurably since 2000 when the Rochford photo was taken.

Q3.   The research has highlighted the need for training and development for administrative staff to withstand the challenges they are facing in their role. The training that has been highlighted is as follows. What role does IMPACT play in providing Training for their members?

- More sophisticated IT training to include statistical presentation of data and database methods
- Financial Training
- Interpersonal skills development – to deal with various situations 'school secretaries' encounter
- Education Legislation
- First Aid Training
- Counselling Skills

Summary: The interviewee described how their training falls under three pillars.

"The first being through the Local Partnership working groups. The second would be in the context of Trade Union members where we organise now with the VEC's. The third where we would have a significant input in training would be in the context of the Central Forums".   *(A5)*

Local Partnership Working Groups: The interviewee described how these might not have filtered down to the 'school secretaries' group of the VEC's successfully, *"I think the jury would be out on that, there is great evidence that it hasn't"*.

Trade Union Members: The interviewee described how the IMPACT Union now sits down with the different groups of members where in the past it would have been from mixed branches. *"We have now everybody in a mixed VEC branch, and we would have provided Trade Union Training in two formats"*.

Format 1: Training people to change from the old structures to the new structure and

Format 2: Training members from both the VEC Headquarters and 'school secretaries' on IMPACT and ICTU Training as Trade Union Reps.

The third area that IMPACT has a significant input in training is in the context of the 'Central Forums' that IMPACT and other Trade Unions and the IVEA on behalf of the VEC's are involved in. Policies would have been devised for all grades to include Personnel Managers and workers in VEC's to include 'school secretaries'.

- Bullying and Harassment
- Complaint Procedures
- Discipline and Grievance

The senior official of IMPACT Trade Union did agree that if a 'school secretary' needed training on 'finance' that is something they did not do but believed it was something that they should be getting into.

Q4.   The research has highlighted the following issues raised by 'school secretaries' in relation to attending the training courses provided by CDVEC. What are your views on the following?

- The difficulty in taking time off to do the occasional training courses offered due to the fact that schools are very busy places and the workload remains/increases
- The location of training courses – usually on the Southside of the City in relation to CDVEC – with traffic the need for central locations to be considered
- In the USA the UFT have occasional per diem secretaries that act as locums who have licences to operate when 'school secretaries' are absent.

Summary: The researcher made reference to how she had previous experience in the Health Service where they had locums to come in when somebody was out. The interviewee described how he/she also had experience of working in the Health service and stated that how in the last two or three years with strictures on the budget that the provision of locums had faded. Since the budget of March 2009 'school secretaries' or any other grades of administrative staff in the VEC sector on maternity leave or any other type of leave is not being replaced and the interviewee could not see this system operating in Ireland. He/she acknowledged that the job of the school secretary/administrator is so important and vital that the school cannot really operate when they are not there and pointed out that it was the job of the VEC to prioritise where they can and cannot have gaps.

The interviewee commented on how he/she could understand why the centre for training administrative staff was on the southside of the city. The greater number of admin staff work on the southside of the city at headquarters but acknowledged the time it takes to get across the city and how a lot of time can be lost in getting back to work. He/she made reference to the neighbouring Co. Dublin VEC where they have schools spread around the back of CDVEC schools on the Northside of the City and did not see why some sort of joint venture on the provision of training and sharing of services could be arranged at a more median location point. *"There certainly is enough 'school secretaries' that ring to justify that"*.

The interviewee made reference to the huge difference between the conditions of a 'school secretary' in a normal school and a VEC school. He/she described how a 'school secretary' in a VEC school always has access to a pension scheme, and under normal circumstances has access to promotional outlets in the VEC Head Office, which 'school secretaries' in the private schools do not have. This would concur with the comments of one principal and one secretary who made reference to how the conditions for 'school secretaries' were so much better than those in the private sector. It would also concur with how school secretaries in New York have to re-negotiate their contracts every couple of years.

Q5   What are your views on the need for professional development for 'school secretaries' so that their role is seen in a more professional light and do you feel the title school secretary adequately describes the role?

Summary: The interviewee described how there were two themes to discuss in answering this question. "*They would be Dignity and Performance Management*".

The findings from the interviews with all principals and one 'school secretary' saw the PMDS system as a way forward. However one group of three 'school secretaries' did not have a good experience with the way their review was handled and saw it as just a box ticking exercise. The interviewee described how there are thirty-three VEC's in Ireland and how all of them have different ways of doing their job. Reference was made to how some are very good at integrating the 'school secretaries' with the general administrative groups at their Head Offices and some are not and how this was quite evident at meetings.

The findings of the Rochford Review (2002) commented on the need for an improvement in the relationships between the administrative staff in schools and their Head Office. This would concur with the findings from the research with 'school secretaries' interviewed who commented on the need for a meeting between staff at all centres to discuss how they could understand each other's need to improve work methods. Two principals made reference to how the review had created an '*us and them*' situation and how it had lost sight of the business of education in the schools.

The interviewee commented on how the problem was not necessarily how the administrative staff interfaced with each other but with how 'school secretaries' interface with other players in the sites that they are in "*that is the vital one and that is where dignity comes into it*".

The interviewee described the advice given by one of his/her colleagues that the way to go was to accept that there is no difference between the 'school secretary' and the administrator in the rest of the VEC.

> "*They should be seen as one and have the same identity, they should demand and get the same thing and the dignity and respect for that*". (A5)

This would concur with one school principal who described how "*school*

secretaries should be demanding that they are seen as professionals".

(PG)

Q6 **Is there a need for increased communication and collaboration to assist 'school secretaries' in their role? Should there be an Open Forum where each can discuss his/her needs with administrative staff in CDVEC Head Office and Schools. Is there a need for a support system to be put in place for more recognition? What are your views on these three issues?**

Summary: The researcher explained that the above question was in light of her research in the USA where a top priority of UFT (School Secretaries Chapter) was in providing professional development for their members. The interviewee made reference to how there was a jointive way that education workers can work together. The researcher made reference to how she had contacted an Education Centre who provides training for teachers on a Wednesday afternoon, in the evenings and at weekends and when she phoned to enquire if this was available to administrative staff working in the schools she was informed that it wasn't. The interviewee described how IMPACT had become aware that there was something happening in this Education Centre and that they could be of assistance there. *"it wouldn't be beyond the Union sitting down with them and seeing if there is a way that we could open doors with them".*

The researcher described the School of Educational Administration in the UK in operation since 2004 and the Certificate in Education Administration course and how there was a Diploma course being developed. She also described the networking service provided for 'school administrators' (Appendix J).

The interviewee replied, " *it looks like fabulous stuff to look at*". He/she commented on the uncertainty in the world at the moment on the industrial

relation front but how it was intended that some form of Partnership will continue into the future. *"A project based on this would be very interesting and would be unstoppable if one was to start it. IMPACT would come in behind that if that is what the people wanted".*

The researcher saw this development as a vignette in her study one that illuminated all the previous questions that went before it (Fearfull, 2005). Another very interesting development in the research was where the interviewee referred to how negotiations with the Education Centre in Dublin could be opened up to facilitate training.

The interviewee commented on how IMPACT has its own website blogg and issues newsletters and how they have 'school secretaries' on their branch. He/she referred to how issues come up that are not usually on professional development but that the process is available. Reference was also made to how IMPACT have not been successful in relation to qualification allowances for members in the industrial relations forum but referred to how there was access to a national pay scale, which is pretty universal across the Public Service and described how it had probably delivered more money in peoples pockets than not having a scale.

The interviewee described how he/she would not be sure about the licence like UFT because people working in administration in a VEC would have the right to work in Head Office or a school. He/she described how there was currently an '*awards system*' in place every year and how this was done through the National Partnership Forums (NPF). Reference was made to how he/she attended one the previous year and how there were awards for good projects undertaken in schools.

> *"They tend to be in the all embracing ones that deliver that open door for clients and children rather than what any one particular group did".* (A5)

Q7. Are there any plans for the new job descriptions being issued to 'school secretaries' and management that reflect the current duties being carried out in schools and colleges?

Summary: One school secretary commented on the fact that she had contacted HR for a job description for her role and was told that there was not one available. The interviewee made reference to the fact that every single group of the 60,000 members that IMPACT has made this point. *"The difficulty is that you can get it done but the photograph goes out of date by the time it is done"* He/she stated that this was the case with the Rochford Review (2002). Reference was made to the plan for the review of Rochford (2002) and how there would a need for role profiles for 'school secretaries/ administrators' which is similar to job descriptions. It was stated of how this would have to be a model that would be developed to an extent that it would have to be set every year. The interviewee commented on how you will never capture all the duties and responsibilities and believed the best way forward was through the Performance Management Development System (PMDS) and commented

> *"If I was to make a case for the up-gradings of 'school secretaries' we would be saying, here is a photograph that we took on such a date and since then it has been enhanced substantially"*. *(A5)*

This would concur with the findings of Casanova (1991) who described how the job descriptions surveyed bore no resemblance to the duties observed in her research.

Q8   Is there anything else that you would like to add as a participant in the research?

The interviewee referred to the role of the 'school secretary' as a very honourable trade but believed there was one thing that needed to be fixed and that was '*esteem and respect*'. *"They don't get the respect that they are*

entitled to" and commented on how maybe the title 'school secretary' is wrong *"school administrator seems more modern"*. *"Maybe it is more important in a broader sense, not just in the VEC sector, but we hear horror stories of 'school secretaries' who are not allowed to be in a school photograph that is taken every year"*. The interviewee described how there were dignity issues that needed dignity profiling and integration with the rest of the participants in education and commented

> *"The 'school secretary' is a job that requires respect and dignity and if nothing else was to come of something that is what I would like to see happen. If that was to happen a lot of other issues discussed would fall into place".*   *(A5)*

This would not concur with the findings from the interviews carried out at Phase 1 of the research that found the 'school secretary' was held in very high esteem by all stakeholders who commented on the very important role they provide that assists the smooth running of the school that enables the education system to be delivered.

This would not concur with the findings of Casanova (1991) and Trachman (1993) who describe how 'school secretaries' are held in very high esteem. One 'school secretary' interviewed in New York referred to the recognition they receive through the UFT and their pedagogical licence. It would however concur with references made during the interviews in CDVEC of how much better 'schools secretaries' were treated in the VEC sector than those working in other education sectors. The research did however uncover feelings of how there was not enough recognition of the workload of 'school secretaries' in many instances with staff in CDVEC Head Office.

5.7   Analysis Step 6 - Phase 3 – Interview with Senior Academic Member of CDVEC

The third phase of the data analysis process involved the final interview with the senior academic member of CDVEC. The main themes and findings from the other phases of the analysis were presented in eleven questions as follows (Appendix N).

Q1   How important do you feel training is for the School Secretaries/Administrators to carry out the role effectively and what role does CDVEC play in providing this training for administrative Staff?

The interviewee described how training was critical because most 'secretaries' start out with a basic secretarial training and that the job is a lot more than that and requires

- dealing with the Public
- dealing with students
- technical knowledge about the systems, software reports that have to be done
- Links with the Department
- dealing with teachers and staff people

The interviewee continued to describe how none of the roles described were part of a particular 'secretarial' type-training course. He/she asked the three following questions to answer this question

1)   *"Is there a need for training – Absolutely*
2)   *Is it on-going   - Yes*
3)   *Should it be customised to the needs of the VEC – Yes" (A6)*

The researcher described how 'school secretaries' were requested to present information in more sophisticated forms and how the Microsoft packages they were trained in had moved on. The interviewee agreed how IT moves on.

> *"What you may have learned in your IT five or ten years ago has been passed out by new versions of the same software. Never mind the new ones but you also need training".* *(A6)*

The interviewee also stressed that there was more than just IT training required and referred to the Irish language training that was now required and how a number of the admin people had done that. The researcher commented on the fact that she herself had undertaken this training. He/she referred to the training required for dealing with the Public and felt that was a critical thing and how to deal with angry parents, and all those type of things that is not part of the standard training for 'school secretaries'. Casanova (1991) and Trachman (1993) described the role played by the 'school secretary' in dealing with angry parents. Trachman (1993) made reference to one instance where they marched right by the 'school secretary' and into the principal's office. One 'school secretary' described how she has to use her initiative and judge the situation in deciding whether she should disturb the principal at a meeting to say

> *" I have a very narky parent in the office"* *(SE)*

Q2. How important is Communication and Collaboration to assist school secretaries/administrators in their role?

The researcher explained that the following points were highlighted by 'school secretaries/administrators'

- The need for an Open Forum Staff Day between the administrative staff in schools, centres and Head Office to discuss their needs and gain a better understanding of each other's work.

- That notices coming from Head Office referred to Academic and Non-Academic staff. It was felt a better wording would be Academic, Administrative and Maintenance Staff.

- That it would be nice if notices coming from the Human Resource Department to staff members would address them by their Christian names. It was also suggested that a visit from the HR Manager to meet the administrative staff working in schools and colleges should be arranged in view of the fact that many administrative staff had never met the HR Manager.

- The need for 'school secretaries' to attend some part of the staff meeting that takes place two to three times a year for the benefit of Communication, Collaboration and Teamwork purposes and that it gives a sense of recognition and value as a staff member. Reference was also made that the senior porter because of his/her frontline position should also attend some part of the meeting that might help with improving processes in the school.

The interviewee was not convinced that administrative or maintenance staff should attend meetings with topics relating to the curriculum, syllabus, school trips, CAO applications or other issues and felt it was a waste of their time. He/she made reference to how the other side to it was there was never a meeting to which they could attend and communicate with staff and felt that this was wrong too. He/she stated that where issues are relevant to all parties of the meeting that

> "*it makes sense for them to attend but that they should not be attending if it is not relevant*". *(A6)*

Reference was also made to how the 'school secretary' might be involved in sitting in on other meetings with the principal or assistant principals on issues like exam entries or when admissions are being discussed, where the 'school secretary' is the person who will collate all the information and press the button for exam entries.

Summary: The findings from this interview would concur with the mixed views of other stakeholders who felt that there should be some way of communicating or some part of the staff meeting that 'school secretaries' and maintenance staff should attend and how it may not be beneficial for them to attend a full staff meeting. It would also concur with the literature from Persaud (2005) of the important role communications played for those involved in 'frontline' services. Casanova (1991) in her observations described the time spent by 'school secretaries' in communicating with their principal would amount to about eleven minutes per day.

Q3   **What are your views on the fact that the research has highlighted the frontline position and pivotal role of the school secretary and how the changes that had taken place particularly since the introduction of the 1998 Education Act and the 2001 Vocational Amendment Act has impinged on their role?**

The researcher outlined the changes identified by stakeholders, which are included in Appendix O of this study.

The interviewee commented on how the list goes on and felt that you could add a whole range of other things if you were to sit down and think about it.

> "*There is no doubt that the role that I would remember originally of the 'school secretary' was very much an administrative, filing and narrow based role but that has changed utterly in the last five or ten years, as a result of all of the above and how much more knowledge the 'school secretary' has to have*". *(A6)*

The interviewee also described how 'school secretaries' are involved in many more processes that they would not have been involved in before, and has to write communication letters to all sorts of external agencies that did not even exist before and how all of this just illustrates the varied nature and the varied tasks that the 'school secretary' has to do.

" A good 'school secretary' doing that is a huge thing".   (A6)

The interviewee made reference to the fact that finance was not on the list which was a huge area of responsibility for the 'school secretary' in a way that it wasn't there before, just keeping track and records of substantial sums of money that moves through schools that didn't move through them before. *"So I would agree with you there are probably other things and it is a huge thing"*   *(A6)*

The interviewee did advise however that the 'school secretary' should not try and become all things to every person and then made reference to how the researcher had described that the 'school secretary' had to have a knowledge of the 'role of the Director of Adult Education' and pointed out that the Director did not have to understand every single role within the whole school that they just need to know what is relevant to their own job and how that would be the same for the 'school secretary'.

> *"The only person who has to know everything is the poor principal, they are supposed to have a full understanding of every little corner, so I wouldn't over push the role of the 'school secretary' they are going to have to put boundaries on it".   (A6)*

The researcher explained how in the summer time, the 'school secretary' is on their own in the college with huge volumes of e.mails, phone calls and people calling to the college seeking information. She also explained how the general public are now pressing the 'school secretary' for more information. The interviewee acknowledged this but warned of the

importance of knowing that there were boundaries to the level of knowledge and level of expertise of the 'school secretary'.

> *"so if people are asking for 'stuff'' outside of what you should know then you actually stop and properly say, I don't know but I can put you in touch with the person who would know".* (A6)

Q4 Do you think the role requires specialist skills and knowledge?

The researcher described how the role had changed over the last decade in terms of the skills and knowledge 'school secretaries' were now required to have to assist them in dealing with the new population of students, their needs and the needs of all stakeholders with whom they interact with during the normal course of their work.

The interviewee commented on how the role does require special skills and knowledge to carry out the role but stressed the need for the administrative person to be very clear where the job of the 'school secretary' starts and stops and made reference of the need for boundaries on the role." *It's not to say that you wouldn't be helpful, encouraging and sympathetic to everyone that comes in to you but there are a whole lot of things*". He/she made reference to how these special skills and knowledge are only in the context of carrying out a clear role that is their role and they don't need the knowledge of everybody else's role or moving into that. He/she saw the special skills and knowledge required in the area of

- IT, People Skills and the knowledge of what the administration is supposed to do and not the fuller knowledge of the whole thing.

This would concur with the views of the principals who referred to how they felt the interpersonal skills were most important in the role. They also made reference to the need for more sophisticated IT skills and to understand

something about the methodology of education and what the school was trying to achieve. Two principals made reference to the fact that more specialist knowledge would be required if the 'school secretary' was operating at a higher level or in an advisory role to include

- Board of Management Meetings – Section 29
- Knowing something on Protocol and Procedures
- Financial Monitoring Function on producing a lot of reports
- Public Expectation – Service Levels in the college for handling a complaint- recording it and responding quickly to the public who have little tolerance for things being done slowly
- A role in Health and Safety
- More information reports could be extracted from CIMS/Facility system – teachers don't have access to this system
- The Information Management system how the whole system could step forward and involve the integration of the office function
- Garda Vetting Aspects for Students Doing Work Experience.

This would also concur with the views of one other principal and the views of 'school secretaries' who felt the role should be at a higher grade and how there should be progression routes in the school area for them to move to. Other principals made reference to the wealth of information 'school secretaries' have, and how this should be tapped into and commented on how they are an "*under used and under valued resource*" *(PE)*

The interviewee referred to the question do you require specialist skills and knowledge to carry out the role and stated

> *" I would be focusing more on the people skills that assist in dealing with the hundred new students who come in the door every year with some unique characteristic that you never met before." (A6)*

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Q5   **Do you think there is a need for the broadening of the current administrative structures in the schools and colleges to withstand the new developments and the nature of the workload undertaken by 'school secretaries'?**

The researcher explained the reason for this question related to the Rochford Review (2002) that resulted in ninety-six per cent of the up-gradings above that at Grade IV level in CDVEC Head Office. She referred to the fact that it was agreed at the same time that an independent study be carried out which now eight years later has never happened. The interviewee explained how he/she did not know enough about the Rochford Review (2002) and commented on how there is an agreed structure for administrative posts that is determined outside of the VEC.

> *"So it is not entirely within the gift of a school or a VEC to kind of acknowledge contribution through promotions".*   *(A6)*

The researcher explained that she had carried out an interview with a senior member of IMPACT Trade Union who informed the research that the terms of reference for a review of Rochford (2002) had been agreed prior to the moratorium in the Public Service. IMPACT hope to commence this study when the present financial crisis improves. The interviewee acknowledged that if there was upgrading to middle management everybody would love that but commented on how this was determined nationally and was not sure if it was a realistic objective.

Q6.   **Is there a correct title for administrative staff working in the schools and colleges of CDVEC?**

The research highlighted the need for professional development for 'school secretaries' and 'administrators' to withstand the challenges presented for

the future. She described how in schools and colleges administrative staff are often referred to as 'school secretaries' particularly in the mainstream area, whereas in the Further Education colleges they are referred to as 'administrators'. She commented on how this was not the grade administrative staff had been appointed to and how in the CDVEC 'Staff Handbook' they are referred to as 'administrative staff'. It is seen as '*outdated*' and '*old fashioned*'. She described how reference was also made to this in light of their image and public service role.

The interviewee agreed that the term 'school secretary' was '*outdated*' and how it sounded more like it was linked to a particular person opposed to a more general administrative role

> **"** *I am not sure if there is a correct or agreed title, but I would far prefer to have the people who work in the schools to be called 'administrators' as it sound like a far more appropriate word than 'school secretary".*   *(A6)*

The researcher explained that in two instances the principals did not like the word 'administrator'. She described where one principal stated, "*well you see they are not administrators as the administration refers to more than one person and involves the principal, deputy and the administrative staff"(PE)*. The researcher also explained how in the USA the literature refers to the principal as 'administrator' and how this can cause some confusion.

The interviewee replied how in Ireland there is a difference between the two. *"There is academic and management staff and that is where I would place Principals. I would call them academic and management staff, I would not call them administrators*. The interviewee went on to describe how an administrator is a person who works particular systems and does what is organised and agreed. A manager drives it and organises it and

decides and makes managerial types of decisions and he/she felt that was the purpose of the principal role.

> *"I would move away from 'school secretary', I don't think it gives full justice in terms of when you hear that word and when you think of what the actual job entails. The word does not do the job justice so I would move to the word 'administrator".*　　　　　*(A6)*

Q7　　Do you feel the leadership styles exercised by school/college principals is a factor in determining the role that the school secretary/administrator plays and the impact they have?

The researcher described how school principals made reference to how the role of the 'school secretary'/administrator was to a large extent determined by the leadership role of the school principal. She also referred to how the analysis of the research had highlighted the supportive role 'school secretaries' gave to principals and the breadth of knowledge and vision they required to do the job. She described how reference was made to how they were an '*under valued*' resource and if treated and used properly they were vital to the '*smooth running*' of the school. They were described as impacting on the '*culture*' and '*ethos*' of the school and how the senior person can create the right environment for the school. Principals referred to the need for students to have access to the office to deal with various needs they have, reference was also made to how the '*modern era*' had crept up on schools and the impact it had on workloads.

The interviewee described how if you go into any school the single most important person in the school in the sense of determining the feel and 'ethos' of the school is the principal.

> *"when you go from one school to another different school, it feels differently and teachers in different schools act differently, but it is hugely created by the way the principal goes about their business".*　　　　　*(A6)*

The interviewee described how styles can vary on a range from one to one hundred from "*strictly 'authoritarian' to the totally 'collaborative' inclusive kind of principal*" and described how the effects of the strictly authoritarian style will almost inevitably affect teachers, admin staff and maintenance staff. Whereas on the other hand if you have an inclusive principal the school administrators will be part and parcel of discussions around things as they are organised and referred to that as a 'healthy environment'.

> *"If we had a view from here it would be that modern management is much more collaborative in nature while people still have their responsibilities, it is much more inclusive and it much more values the opinions of everybody and that is the best kind of style for this kind of age in that school administrators have a positive role, a valued role where they are encouraged to make their contributions and that is the style we would like to see".* (A6)

This would concur with the views of Persaud (2005) and Bush (2008) who stress the very important role played by leaders in developing others.

Q8   How can 'school secretaries/administrators best meet the needs of all stakeholders?

An analysis of the student survey forms returned by students who participated in the research was presented to the interviewee. Similar questions asked to all stakeholders were asked in the survey (Appendix L).

The interviewee stated that where student was put on the survey form it could have been replaced with how the teacher saw the role.

> *"I would say you could rewrite that entirely from the point of view of teachers as well, which just shows how complex the actual role is for the poor admin person sitting at the desk, because they are not just dealing with students and teachers but a whole lot of outsiders as well, bringing in deliveries, parents calling about access for students, Head Office calling about statistics that aren't back, whatever it happens to be. So this can be applied to everybody. So how can they meet the needs of all stakeholders?* (A6)

The interviewee described how this is where he /she goes back to the fact that the 'school secretary/administrator' needs their job really clarified and the boundaries set for it.

> "*If you try to be all things to all people at all times, you actually end up getting nowhere and that is why sometimes the school office is closed from 2.30 to 3.30 p.m. in order to let somebody have a little bit of time to let them catch up on all the things that come in. If you try to become everything to everyone you will get nothing done*".   (A6)

He/she stated that if you add up the needs of all stakeholders and then add them all together they make '*life*' impossible for the 'school secretary' and stressed the need for boundaries.

> "*The limitations and the organisation comes into place and if you haven't got that, what you end up with is a bewildered 'school secretary', massively busy, but massively ineffective as well*".   (A6)

The researcher commented on how school principals and the senior official from IMPACT felt that the PMDS (Performance Management Development System) was the way forward for the role of the 'school secretary' to get the training and recognition required. The interviewee was not aware of where the PMDS was at the present time but felt that it did not stop a principal and an administrator sitting down together to organise how a job is done in the school. He/she felt that this would be a very good ideal if it did happen, where it put some sort of control in place, but that in the absence of this control everyone pulls on the 'poor school secretary'.

Q9 (a) What is important to School Secretaries /Administrators in their work role? Administrators identified what is important to them in their jobs as

- They take pride in their role
- They take it seriously
- They like to do a good job
- Achieving job Satisfaction
- Providing a Professional Service
- Presenting a Professional Image to the Public
- Serving the Mission Statement of CDVEC and the Needs of the School

(b) What skills are required to do the job? Stakeholders identified the skills they felt were important to carry out the job of school Secretary/administrator

- Communication
- IT
- Financial
- Delegation
- Interpersonal Skills
- Discretion
- Self-Assurance
- A Breadth of Vision
- Confidentiality
- Commonsense
- Trustworthiness
- Understanding the Methodology of Education

The interviewee commented on how there was a lot in the above and to give them that person and it would be great.

Q 10   The researcher explained the research undertaken in the USA with 'school secretaries' and in the UK with the Chairman of the School of Educational Administration to the interviewee and asked for their views on it?

The interviewee commented on how he/she immediately felt it would be good if something like what was offered in the UK was offered here and while there was never the mechanism for it to exist before that there was now. He/she described how the developments in FETAC really lend itself to this kind of training outlined and stated

> " *if I was thinking of a National Framework, and where things lie, a 'school administration person' would strike me as a Level Six. At that kind of level it is a professional qualification. It is above Leaving Certificate level and above basic secretarial training level. It is a specific focused certified kind of training*".   *(A6)*

He/she imagined that there was the capacity to create an award in something like school administration and how it could be done on a part-time basis over a period of time and at the end of it the 'school secretary' would be given a certificate at Level 6 to include

- IT module on DES database
- IT Presentation Skills
- Finance
- Self-Awareness
- Soft-skills

The researcher described how IMPACT would be prepared to go behind a development like this and how she had contacted an Education Centre

regarding the training they provided. The interviewee described the benefits of FETAC and how it brings National Certification to peoples efforts and

> *"that is where I'd be moving and what you have done with it, you could build the modules over time, you might need elements of HR. It needs to be part of a coherent overall programme".*   *(A6)*

The researcher asked about the possibility of progression to a 3rd level college like DCU who run a Diploma in Education Studies.

> *"You always have to as part of creating a National Awards a type of progression route for when you finish. Where else can you go and that is where DCU might come into it. We are not really encouraging people to create awards that are cul de sacs in themselves, just like this and it goes nowhere. So they would want this type of link. So it seems to me that the level that is missing is Level 6".*   *(A6)*

Q11   Is there anything else that you would like to add as a participant in the research?

The interviewee said, *"that would be my final answer to the kind of logic of what you are saying"*

- *What is the role?*
- *Do you need Training?*
- *The answer is Yes*
- *What kind of things?*
- *There is all sorts of issues identified there*
- *So the next question to me is how could we get that done*
- *The answer is the creation of a Level 6 National Certificate*
- *Indeed it might well be available on line*

- *Somebody has to lead this you can't just leave it and hope that it happens*

- *Somebody ends up leading it because they believe in it as being a good thing and that it is made available to everybody and that you include everybody in discussions as you develop it."* *(A6)*

Silverman (2002, p. 148) describes how tapes and transcripts offer more than just something to begin with. They are a public record, available to the scientific community. They can be replayed and transcripts can be improved and analysis can take on a different track, unlimited by the original transcript. The researcher not interested in the developing a theory that presumes you can arrive at a 'privileged account of others but instead giving '*voice*' to others (Fearfull, 2005) that requires the highest level of interpretation and abstraction from the data in order to organise concepts and explain the phenomenon of interest.

5.8   Conclusion

This chapter was constructed on completing a thorough and detailed analysis of the research, which was very comprehensive and gave a good explanation of the steps taken to elect the relevant information to inform the researcher on the key issues that relate to the role of the school secretary.   It explained the research analysis to the reader and the questions asked to investigate the research question. The researcher explained why each question had been chosen that was referenced back to the literature review. The researcher introduced the research participants in her study and those in the USA and UK. She explained the sequence of the research (p.69) and how the research was analysed in three phases. The findings from the three phases of the research analysis are presented in the following chapter.

Chapter 6

Presentation of Findings

'An Exploration of the Role of the School Secretary/Administrator in the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee' (CDVEC)

Introduction

This chapter presents the author's research findings. In doing so, it refers back to the research question and the literature review. The research question focused on 'an exploration of the role of the school secretary in the VEC system. The objective of this study was to explore the role of 'school secretary' in the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee (CDVEC) with a view to recommending improvements in the job specification that will benefit all stakeholders.

Six procedural steps outlined in the previous chapter were involved in conducting this research study. The results of each step provide information relative to the research question. The chapter is organised according to the findings from the questions asked in the interviews, surveys and through the document analysis. The findings from each of the three phases of the data analysis is then presented.

The literature review discussed six areas of relevance to the research topic to inform the author on the most up to date thinking and developments on the role and its relevance to the school secretary. The areas reviewed included recent developments in Environmental and Organisational change that were happening in both the business and world of education. It

involved looking at how CDVEC responded as an organisation to the change it was experiencing in terms of course and service development.

The literature review looked at the discussions in Education Administration and how it evolved as a discipline in the UK in the 1970s for those involved in managing schools and colleges. The literature discuses cases made that this should now extend to other support staff in education to include the school secretary. Education Management is seen as a 'complex phenomena' in the education world, just as it is the business world. The literature presents the arguments made in support of those who believe it should be managed only from an education perspective and those who believe that you cannot ignore what is happening in the business world and how in turn it impacts on the education process.

The importance of Education Leadership and its many facets to include the results of using Distributed, Collaborative, Visionary and Transformational styles are discussed in terms of leading schools into the 21st Century. This discussion includes the pivotal role of the leader on the role of the 'school secretary'. The IVEA (2008) report forecasts the skills and training required by the Irish workforce for the 21st century and describes how much of this will take place within the VEC remit. The literature discusses the impact of this forecast on those involved in education and the professional development and training required by 'school secretaries' to meet these challenges. In view of the dearth of literature available on the role of the 'school secretary' the literature review discusses what has been researched in the UK and USA.

The conceptual framework for this study illustrates how a qualitative research methodology and participatory world view was used in this research methodology. A 'critical theory' stance was adopted because the researcher found this approach best suited her philosophical assumptions on the role of the 'school secretary'. The main source of data collection was

through interviews, field notes and surveys. The data was analysed using a combined approach of discourse analysis and interpretive sociology with a key focus on the language used to describe events.

6.1   Main Themes Emerging from the Data Analysis

The researcher discovered that five main themes had emerged from the data analysis.

1.   The need for greater recognition of the role at CDVEC Executive Management and Department of Education and Skills level.

2.   Much greater understanding of what the role entails and the impact of this change on 'school secretaries'

3.   Re-profiling of the role to address current and future priorities.

4.   The need for on-going professional development and training.

5.   The Future Role of the School Administrator

6.1.1   The need for greater recognition of the role at CDVEC Executive Management and Department of Education and Skills level

The research findings indicated that all stakeholders interviewed in the research held the 'school secretary' in very high esteem. They made reference to the very important role they play in education by providing a service to all stakeholders through the huge amount of knowledge and

expertise they possess, the expert skills they require in many disciplines of business and their interpersonal skills in dealing with people.

They described them as 'frontline people', at the 'centre or hub' of the organisation, where everything else revolves around them. They saw them as impacting on the culture and ethos of the school or college and made reference to the role they play in the 'admissions process' in the school. The findings did however uncover that the role did not get the recognition it deserved and they were seen as a very undervalued resource. This would compare with the views on clerical work uncovered by Fearfull (2005) and Casanova (1991) who described how the 'school secretary' did not get a mention in any of the literature on education administration, which would lead to the belief that they received very little recognition for the work they did in the education process.

Phase one of the research analysis discussed the need for 'school secretaries' to organise themselves into a cohesive group, that meet regularly, network together and '*put their own stamp on it*'. This would concur with the findings from Casanova (1991) who described how 'school secretaries' in the USA had organised themselves into a cohesive group that preferred to be associated with those involved in the education process rather than with other clerical workers. This would also concur with the findings from the research undertaken by the author in New York where 'school secretaries' are members of 'school secretaries' chapter of UFT. Attwood (2008) makes reference to the provision of networking by the School of Educational Administration for 'school administrators' but describes how this network was not used in the way he would like it to be.

Phase two of the analysis with the Senior Official of IMPACT Trade Union further emphasised how the role was undervalued. He/she described the numerous queries received from 'school secretaries' on a daily basis describing how the role had changed and the workload they were now

required to undertake. This was also observed at the various levels of meetings attended around the country. The interviewee described how much more difficult it was for 'school secretaries' outside the vocational sector who did not have the same support systems, contracts of employment and access to national pay scales in place. The most important wish for the interviewee was for 'school secretaries' to receive the dignity and respect they deserve.

This phase of the research also uncovered the need for 'school secretaries' to avail of the opportunities to network with the 'school secretaries' branch of IMPACT who have eight to nine representatives on their National Branch. The research also uncovered how IMPACT has organised its business under the different sectors of employment in the Public Service. The education sector has now separate forums for representation for non-academic staff involved in education. This would concur with the findings of Ervolina (2008) chairperson of the 'school secretaries' chapter of UFT who describe how UFT looks after their needs. The main difference being that one union UFT represents all categories of staff in the education process whereas in Ireland different Unions look after the different categories.

Phase three of the research analysis of the interview with the senior academic member of CDVEC acknowledged and empathised how the current role of the 'school secretary' today had evolved into being '*everything to everyone,*' often at the same time, where you end up with an '*overworked and bewildered school secretary*'. The interviewee advised of the need for '*boundaries*' to be put on the 'role' in order that it be seen in a more effective and more professional light.

6.1.2 Much greater understanding of what the role entails and the impact of this change on 'school secretaries'

Phase one of the research analysis can be compared to the advice of Jarrett (2008) of the need for organisations to undertake a radar scan of their environment to assess the changes happening. A 'radar scan' of the environment with 'school secretaries' and all stakeholders found that the role bore no resemblance to what it was prior to the development of the Further Education (FE) sector in the 1980s (Cooke, 2009 and Trant, 2007). Further changes were experienced in the early 1990s, with contracts of employment (Meehan, 1995) and in the late 1990s with new legislative frameworks. McDonald (2008) described these changes as the most enacted era in this history of the State referring to the significant developments following the 1998 Education Act and the acts that followed. Moriarty (2008) and McGarr (2008) described the significance of the passing of the Vocational Amendment Act (2001) that heralded a new era in the vocational education sector.

The findings from the interviews carried out with school principals uncovered that there were now two distinctive sides in the FE sector

- The Admissions Side and
- The Administration Side

The findings illustrated the huge role the 'school secretary' played in the admissions side with

- Telephone enquiries
- Enrolments
- Setting up Interviews
- Registration/Fees
- Database Systems

The findings illustrated the role played by the 'school secretary' in the administration process through the image that one thousand adults created and eighty teachers

- HR – Contracts
- Ordering/Purchasing
- Payroll
- Banking
- Assessment

The research findings also uncovered that with these new developments in the FE Sector came with it more specialised responsibility than was in previous years

- Increased Accountability
- Increased Record Keeping
- More Specialised forms of Reporting
- Financial Analysis
- Management of IT systems

One principal commented on how all of this was coming from the outside due to the networking of systems across departments DES, CDVEC Head Office and other external agencies *"we have been technalised"*. One 'school secretary' referred to the fact of how everything that happens in a school will have some administration element to it and find its way into the school office. He/she also commented on the fact that the role of the post holder who also has teaching duties is too broad and another reason why it ends up in the school office. Another 'school secretary' made reference to the fact that very often they end up word processing documents for staff who do not have the computer skills to do so.

The Rochford Review (2002) described how there were three categories of schools in CDVEC

1) Mainstream
2) Mainstream with Further Education
3) Further Education

The role was described by one principal as multi-facet "*there are some tasks that have to be done on a weekly basis vis-a-vie CDVEC* ".

- CID Staff
- Pro-Rata Staff
- Full-Time Staff
- Part-Time Staff
- Contracts
- Payments
- Weekly Wages
- Banking
- Correspondence on behalf of the principals/letters
- Board of Management Meetings

The Principal then went on to describe the work for the Department of Education and Skills (DES)

- September/October Returns
- Liaising with DES on Returns
- Follow up-Queries

The research findings uncovered that 'school secretaries' also assist Course Directors, Year Heads and Adult Education Directors with

- Preparing Public Relations Material
- Assisting with Examination Entries

The research analysis of the literature of the response by CDVEC over the last thirty years to the changes experienced in the environment is found through the courses and services it provides to the community that is depicted in school brochures, Guide to CDVEC Courses (2010), CDVEC Further Education Courses (2010), the 75th Anniversary Journal of CDVEC Sports and Cultural Council (2010) and CDVEC websites. It is also uncovered in the literature of Cooke (2009), Trant (2007), The IVEA Report (2008) and McGarr (2008). Jarrett (2008) describes just as organisations need to look to their environment they can also fall over organisational issues.

One school principal commented on the need for 'school secretaries' to learn to say 'no' to work that is *thrown* in on their desk that others should be doing. A 'school secretary' commented on how she learned to deal with difficult situations or when asked in a non-pleasant way to do something by learning to adjust her attitude to it "I just say *no problem*. He/she did also add that the person would normally come back later and apologise for the *tone* of voice they asked for the work to be done in.

Research findings from Phase two of the interview with the Senior Official Of IMPACT Trade Union described how in VEC's there have been huge steps forward into branching out into all kinds of different areas *the bolt on areas*' and is hearing everyday of 'school secretary's' struggling to keep up with this change. The interviewee described how a lot of what was done before manually by the academic staff and teachers was now arriving electronically and was suddenly becoming the work of the 'school secretary' and stressed how this huge increase in responsibility was not *recognised*' by anybody.

The findings from this phase of the research highlighted the reporting relationships between a 'school secretary' and a senior official in the DES where they *'dance to the tune'* of one APO, or PO who is telling them to '*chain*' themselves to one 'runaway horse' while at the same time another section of the Department is demanding that they change everything and '*chain*' themselves to another runaway horse. This would confirm the findings of the OECD (2008) report that highlighted the need for better Public Service and the need to co-ordinate all services more efficiently across the Public Service.

6.1.3   Re-profiling of the Role to address current and future priorities

The implementation of the Rochford Review (2002) resulted in ninety-six per cent of up-gradings above that of Grade IV being allocated to the administrative structures at CDVEC Head Office with an agreement for a review in the further education sector that never happened. The research findings found that the structures in place in CDVEC schools and colleges did not meet the education requirements of the college, the work performed by 'school secretaries' and their level of responsibility. The principals described the outcome of the Rochford Review (2002) as follows

" schools got nothing", "it did not serve the education needs of the school", " it only served the administrative structures", "the foot soldiers who carry out the work were not compensated", "I see it as the tail wagging the dog to be honest, that has lost sight of the whole business of education", "schools got what was requested, not what the Rochford Review (2002) recommended".

The findings from the research interviews with 'school secretaries' and other stakeholders found that the role and responsibilities did not reflect the level of gradings in the school that was based on their enrolment figures for

schools in 2001. *"The level for a senior grade should be at least that of Grade V and all other Grades should be at Grade IV Level"*. Further evidence of this was found when the researcher asked two questions as to whether stakeholders felt that the 'school secretary' had an impact in the education system or whether they required specialised knowledge to carry out the role.

The findings to the first part of this question varied from yes they did have a direct impact because of their knowledge of the system, to having an indirect impact because they did not in anyway impact on the curriculum. Other findings indicated that the process of delivering education was not only what happened in the classroom but what enabled the education process to be delivered. The findings from the research interviews with principals found that if the senior person was operating at a *'higher level or operating in an advisory level then they would be providing specialist knowledge'*. The findings referred to were as follows

- Health and Safety
- Advising at a Board of Management on a section 29 procedure
- Taking on the Garda Vetting Forms for Students on various PLC Courses

One other principal also referred to the need for a senior role to assist in *'building matters and in making other decisions'* that would free up the principal to allow him/her deal with the leadership functions of the role. This would concur with the findings from the views of secretaries who described how there was no progression route for administrative staff in the school/college area where they loved to work.

The findings from the research analysis of the visit of the researcher to a vocational school in the USA uncovered how school secretaries were organised in the various areas of their specialisation – *'The Payroll*

Secretary, The Purchasing Secretary, The Admissions Secretary, The Guidance Secretary, The Remedial Secretary'. The findings also revealed a Business Manager looked after the budget of the college that allowed the principal concentrate on the curriculum and leadership role. Attwood (2008) made reference to the Bursars employed in the schools and colleges in the UK to look after school budgets.

The findings outlined above would concur with the views of a guidance counsellor interviewed who chairs and takes the minutes of a meeting. He/she commented on the benefits of a 'school secretary' present to take detailed minutes that would allow him/her participate more fully in the meeting.

The research findings from a group of teachers interviewed described how one teacher highlighted that the knowledge required by school secretaries to carry out their role was so specialised that it could hinder them from gaining employment in the business world. This would concur with the findings from the literature of Lyons (2010) who warned of the great danger of the application of business management theory in an education setting.

Phase two of the research highlighted that negotiations had taken place on restructuring for 'school secretaries' from 2003 onwards between IMPACT Trade Union and the DES. The findings uncovered that the DES refused to evoke two clauses of the agreement and how negotiations broke down in 2005 under a National Agreement drawn up that did not allow for cost increasing claims. The findings revealed that the senior official brought the matter before the Labour Relations Commission that allowed a review for this report. The terms of reference and a chairman of the review had been set in place but postponed because of the serious deterioration in the public finances and would commence again as soon as the economy recovered. Phase three of the research findings with the senior academic member of management found that he/she did not have specific knowledge of the

Rochford Review (2002) and commented on the agreed structures that were in place for administrative posts. *"it is not within the gift of a school or VEC to acknowledge contributions through promotions, that is determined outside and nationally, but if it could happen, I mean people would love that, but is it a realistic objective, I am not sure that it is" (A6)*

6.1.4 The need for on going Professional Development and Training

The research findings highlighted the benefits gained by academics in professional development and how it should be a requirement for 'school secretaries'. The research findings also indicated that 'school secretaries' should be demanding this development for themselves.   Attwood (2008) described how the school of educational administration networking site for school administrators in the schools in the UK was not used as much as he would like it to be. The research also uncovered a cohesive group of 'school secretaries' in the USA who provide the professional development that 'school secretaries' want and need (Ervolina, 2008). The researcher had first hand experience of this when she visited New York in 2009 and attended a full-day in-service training on very relevant issues in relation to the work of the 'school secretary' to include the following

- Health and Safety Evacuation
- Understanding Gangs
- Swine Flu
- Form Filling Procedures

The research findings from the comparative study in New York highlighted the professional development awards ceremony in place for 'school secretaries'. The researcher attended a luncheon where 'school secretaries' nominated by their schools from the five boroughs of New York State were presented with beautiful plaques for their outstanding achievements in their role in the school. The researcher in her report on the study to the

chairperson referred to these plaques as the '*hallmarks of their profession'*.
A presentation on the history of the 'school secretaries' chapter of the UFT
was presented and prepared by the Chairperson (Ervolina, 2008) to include
historic materials and tools used by their predecessors in their role. The
event was attended by both current and past 'school secretaries'.

The training identified by 'school secretaries' from Phase one of the
research included

- More sophisticated IT training and presentation packages
- Finance
- Public Relations
- Middle Management
- Student Entitlements
- Workshops

The training identified from a principal's perspective for 'school secretaries'
included

- Teamwork
- Communication
- Marketing
- Understanding the Methodologies of Education
- Financial and Statistical Analysis

One 'school secretary' stated, " *I think for working in the schools and
colleges definitely we should be trained beforehand. There are so many
different software packages"*. This would concur with the findings for
training required by 'school secretaries' in New York who are required to
obtain a pedagogical licences before commencing employment. Ervolina
(2008) described how this licence is obtained through examination.

Another 'school secretary' described the need for training to middle-management level where the 'school secretary' would then be valued and recognised for it.

> "*On completion of these courses that are relevant to your job and promotion that you would be recognised for it and it would make you a more valued person in the VEC and flexible, that you could go to other centres and that you could apply your skills. I think it is important, I really do*"   (SM)

This would concur with the findings from the literature of the EGFSN Group (2007) who describe how the level of demand for training and education is not commensurate with the perceived need for it. They point out that one of the reasons is that individuals and business are not aware of their skills shortcomings. Jarrett (2008) describes the importance of doing radar scans of the environment to see what their competitors are doing and also to be aware of the 'soft' information that is coming from their workers.

Phase two of the research analysis revealed that the training in place for IMPACT members fell into three pillars.

- *"The first being through the Local Partnership working groups*
- *The second would be in the context of Trade Union Members where we organise now with the VEC's*
- *The third where we would have a significant input in training would be in the context of the Central Forums"*(A5)

The research findings did reveal the fact that if "school secretaries' needed training on a new financial system, that IMPACT have not got into that per se *"it is a place I think we should be getting into"*. The findings did however indicate that if a development like that organised by Attwood (2008) was developed in Ireland that IMPACT would go behind it. The

findings also indicated that links could be negotiated and developed with a local Education Centre who provides training to academic staff but which is currently not available to administrative staff.

The findings from the interviews with principals, one school secretary and the senior official from IMPACT saw the way forward for 'school secretaries' through the Performance Management Development System (PMDS). The senior official referred to how the Croke Park Agreement (2010) had identified that under the Public Service Reform (2010 –2014) that PMDS will become a feature in future developments and made reference to how this was in operation in the Civil Service *"They are actually happy with the joy that performance management brings"*. The research findings with a group of three 'school secretaries' interviewed indicated that they did not have a good experience with the way their review was handled and saw it as *"just a box ticking exercise"*.

Fearfull (2005) described a vignette from the study as one that illuminates all the other points that went before it. The research findings from phase three of the study with the senior academic member of CDVEC commented on how it would be good if something similar to what was offered by the school of educational administration was offered nationally and referred to the fact that there had never been a mechanism for this to happen before that there was now through FETAC. He/she described how FETAC lends itself to this kind of training and brings National Certification to peoples efforts.

> " *if I was thinking of a National Framework, and where things lie, a 'school administration person' would strike me as a Level Six. At that kind of level it is a professional qualification.*" *(A6)*

The findings further indicated the possibility of the capacity to create an award in '*administration*' that could be done on a part-time basis over a period of time where at the end the 'school secretary' would received a

certificate at Level 6. The modules identified were as follows

- IT module to include the DES database
- IT Presentation Skills
- Finance
- Self-Awareness
- Soft-skills

The findings described how modules could be built up over time and that the programme needed to be part of a coherent overall programme. It also uncovered the possibility after completing a Level 6 Award in '*administration*' of continuing on to a third level programme.

6.1.5   The Future Role of the School Administrator

The final theme of the research presents the findings from the above five themes that involves recommendations for paving the way forward for the future of the role of the 'school secretary' in the education system. These include

- The need for 'school secretaries' to '*organise*' themselves into a '*cohesive group*' that demands '*professional development and training*' at a level that reflects the current demands of the role in light of the environmental and organisational factors that they have faced in the education system that they are part of.

- That all stakeholders fully appreciate the role of the 'school secretary' and the work they do and see them as a very '*valued*' member of the school team
- That 'school secretaries' '*impact*' on the education system whether it is in a direct or indirect way

- That in order for the level of work of the 'school secretary' to be recognised, fully appreciated and valued for the '*specialist knowledge and skills*' that have been identified in the research, that '*boundaries*' be put in place on the role and an up-to-date 'j*ob description*' drawn up that prevents 'school secretaries' feeling that they '*have to be everything to everyone*' where they can concentrate on the '*new and changing*' developments that the role demands.

- That the title '*school secretary*' is outdated and old fashioned and does not reflect the role as it is today in the 21st century. The findings recommended that it be changed to '*school administrator*'.

- The need for a '*middle-management grade*' in schools and colleges to assist principals in an '*advisory*' capacity on School Budgets, Health and Safety, Board of Management Appeals, Garda Vetting for Students on PLC courses and Buildings' related matters.

- Highlighted the '*new developments*' in IMPACT Trade Union that reflect similarities to that of the UFT where their '*business*' is now arranged under a special sector for '*non-academic staff*' involved in education.

- That there is a '*school secretaries group*' of IMPACT that are represented Nationally and '*network*' together.

- That 'school secretaries' indicated '*disappointment and lack of confidence*' in their Union resulting from the Rochford Review (2002).

- A lack of 'C*ommunication*' between IMPACT and 'school secretaries' in CDVEC on the developments that have taken place since Rochford (2002).

- Uncovered that IMPACT has a '*review*' waiting to happen on the re-structuring in CDVEC when the Public Finances begin to recover.

- That '*awards ceremonies*' are in place for members of IMPACT through the National Partnership Forum (NPF) on an annual basis that recognise contributions by non-academic staff in the education process.

- That IMPACT will get behind any '*training*' that is put in place for 'school secretaries' and have admitted that this is what they should be getting into.

- The development of a '*FETAC Level 6 Award in Education Administration*' that identifies '*progression routes*' for the administrative staff of VEC's nationally.

- That 'school secretaries' despite whatever side of the '*Atlantic Ocean*' they are working on extend the '*hand of friendship*' and whose motto is '*we are all in it together*,' experience the same feelings and joy of working and being part of the education process.

- The insight into the '*professional development*' that the Chairperson of UFT strives to provide through 'the 'school secretaries' chapter' for their members.

- The value of undertaking a '*historic review*' of the role of the 'school secretary' that is of benefit to past, current and future staff.

- The '*value*' of the School of Educational Administration that has developed specific programmes in Education Administration at Certificate and Diploma level to reflect the training required to assist 'school administrators' in the '*smooth running*' of the '*school office*' and that reflects the need that they be seen in a more '*professional*' light

- The 'v*alue*' that Attwood (2008) has created for 'school administrators' working in the 'schools and colleges of the UK' in providing a '*network*' service, website and '*newsletter*' that brings together all the developments, problems and solutions to assist 'school administrators' in their role.

- The '*published literature*' by the Hamilton School of Education Administration through Attwood (2008) that reduces the '*dearth of literature*' on the role of the 'school secretary/school administrator'

- Above all the '*voice*' given to school secretaries/school administrators in a *qualitative* study, by adopting a '*critical theory*' and '*participatory worldview*', with a special focus on '*interpretive*' analysis and '*language*' through the use of DA (Discourse Analysis).

6.2. Conclusion

This chapter presented the research findings from the three phases of the research analysis. Five main themes emerged that were discussed and referred back to the literature. The final theme of the findings '*paving the way forward*' for the future of the role of the 'school secretary', presented the findings from the previous four themes. The following chapter will draw the research to a conclusion and make recommendations.

Chapter 7

Conclusions and Recommendations

'An Exploration of The Role of the School Secretary/Administrator in the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee' (CDVEC)

Introduction

This chapter draws the research to a conclusion. In doing so it refers back to the previous chapters in the study and their relationship with the findings. It discusses the findings of the study in terms of the impact on the role of the 'school secretary' in the education system and the effects on all stakeholders involved. It makes recommendations for the improvement of the role for the future that will in turn benefit all stakeholders. Finally, the researcher discusses the research in terms of what it means to her and the experience gained from carrying out the study.

7.1.   Why this Study?

The first chapter in this study introduced the researcher to the reader. It introduced her organisation CDVEC and gave a background of the roles undertaken and experience she has gained in the organisation. A profile of the researcher described her experience in administration and part-time teaching and her return to education as a mature student.

In chapter two the researcher outlined in the context of the study the factors that influenced the study to include the development of the Further Education Sector, changes in the curriculum, the enlargement of the EU that saw a new population of students enrolling on courses, the effects of the

recessions, the separation of CDVEC and DIT, changes in employment legislation, a series of education legislation and the effects of the Rochford Review (2002).

In Chapter three of the study a comprehensive review of the literature related to issues that affect the role of the 'school secretary' was discussed. In Chapter four the methodology to be employed to address the research question was described. Chapter five described the research analysis and chapter six presented the research findings.

The researcher described how her reasons for undertaking the research were

1)   To achieve greater recognition of the role of the school secretary

2)   To address the dearth of literature available on the role and contribute to new knowledge

3)   To respond to the Rochford Review (2002)

The following section of this chapter will address whether or not these questions have been answered in the study.

7.1.1   To achieve greater recognition of the role of the school secretary

The author described how this qualitative interpretive study had not only achieved this aim but went far beyond her expectations of what the findings would uncover to include

- How all stakeholders interviewed held the 'school secretary' in very high esteem for the work they perform and the support they provide.

- Recognition of the high level of skill and knowledge they possess and require to carry out their role and how this professional knowledge should be tapped into by other stakeholders in the system.

- Recognition of the multi-facet nature of the role and the interpersonal skills required.

- Recognition of their Public Service image and their role in the community.

- This study provided the foundation of a detailed job description of the current duties and skills required in the role and advises of the need for this to be up-dated on an annual basis.

- Recognition of the ability to adapt and embrace the many changing situations and technology that they have experienced over the last twenty years.

- Recognition of the loyalty and dedication to the role and interest in education.

- Recognition of what the role entails, how it is viewed and changed, by the Senior Member of Impact Trade Union to include: how the 'school secretary' is required to report and answer questions to senior officials in the DES and other agencies.

- The significant changes in the VEC sector that has increased the
  workload of the 'school secretary'.   A commitment from
  IMPACT that they would become involved in any training or
  programmes of study introduced.

- An awareness of the services provided by IMPACT that 'school
  secretaries' should be aware of.

- Recognition of the role, the challenges and the increase in
  workload by the Senior Academic Member of CDVEC
  Management to the extent that boundaries and limitations should
  be put on the role to allow the 'school secretary' perform the
  key requirements of the role. The agreement of the need for a
  change of title from 'school secretary' to 'school administrator'
  that would describe the role as it is today in the modern era of
  the 21st Century. An agreement that professional development
  and training is required for 'school secretaries' to carry out their
  role and recognition that this should take place at Level 6 on the
  NFQ framework. An expression of keen interest to develop a
  FETAC National Award in school administration that could lead
  to further studies at 3rd level.

7.1.2.   To address the dearth of literature available

Casanova (1991) described in her research the dearth of literature available
on the role of the elementary 'school secretary' and the necessity to devise
other means to facilitate understanding the role.   The findings also indicated
that much of the literature directly relating to the role was from the USA
and UK that provided a great source of information and contribution to new
knowledge for her. She also had to devise other means to facilitate her

understanding of the role to present a framework for her research. She uncovered this through the literature on

- Curriculum Development and Change
- The Irish Vocational Education System (IVEA)
- CDVEC information on courses and services and school brochures
- The Rochford Review (2002)
- IMPACT Trade Union
- The National Partnership Forum
- The OECD (2008) Report
- Literature on Education Leadership
- Literature on Education Administration
- Literature from the Business Environment
- Tomorrow's Skills Towards a National Skills Strategy
- The perceived view of clerical knowledge and skill (Fearfull, 2005)

The author describes her reasons for selecting this literature that stems from her own philosophical assumptions outlined in the context of the study through the changes she has experienced over a twenty-nine year period in the organisation. The findings from the research would further reinforce this view despite the fact that the 'school secretary' gets little mention outside that of the Rochford Review (2002). Each area of the literature plays a significant role in the work of the 'school secretary' that has contributed to new knowledge and reduces the findings on the dearth available on the role.

7.1.3   Response to Rochford Review (2002)

At the onset of this study the researcher described how ninety-six percent of up-gradings above that of Grade IV level were allocated to

the administrative structures in CDVEC Head Office. The research uncovered

- The huge loss not only to 'school secretaries' but also to the education process that did not take account of evening school enrolments.

- That the review was not what Rochford (2002) recommended but what was requested by those involved in the negotiations.

- That the review has created an us and them situation between Head Office and Schools.

- That the review described how CDVEC was under resourced, under skilled, had poorer career and Supervisory/Specialist Structures, Staff Welfare and Development and Employee Assistance. This is still the situation in schools in 2011.

- That the structures in place in schools and colleges did not reflect the levels of responsibility and changes experienced in the schools and colleges by the administrative staff.

- There are no progression routes in schools and colleges and the need for a Senior Grade in the schools to assist the principals in an advisory role.

- That terms of reference and a chairperson were in place in 2008 to undertake a further review on the structures at CDVEC Head Office and in the schools. This review was to be another statistical review resulting from the increase in workload both at CDVEC headquarters and in the schools. The findings described

how this study was shelved due to the serious deterioration in the public finances.

7.1.4   Creating A Learning Organisation

Griego et al (2000) describes a learning organisation as one that constantly improves results based on increased performance made possible because it is growing more adroit. They see key aspects of a learning organisation to include: training and education, rewards and recognition, vision and strategy and individual and team development. According to Senge (1990, p. 3), learning organisations are

> …. Organisations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning to see the whole together.

Senge (1990, p. 14) describes five dimensions of learning organisations to include; systems thinking, a personal mastery, mental models, a shared vision and team learning. The main benefits are

- Maintaining levels of innovation and remaining competitive
- Being better placed to respond to external pressures
- Having the knowledge to better link resources to customer needs
- Improving quality of outputs at all levels
- Improving Corporate image by becoming more people orientated
- Increasing the pace of change within the organisation.

Finger and Brand (1999) in their study of attempts to reform the Swiss Postal Service conclude that it is not possible to transform a bureaucratic

organisation by learning initiatives alone. They cite Dixon (1994) who sees as imperative that learning organisations make a link between individual and collective learning and the organisation's strategic objective. They make a case for some form of measurement of organisational learning so that it is possible to assess the extent to which such learning contributes or not towards strategic objectives.

Whilst the research findings do not indicate that CDVEC is a learning organisation it does however point the way that it can climb the first step of the ladder to becoming a learning organisation. This includes providing the necessary resources as outlined for the training and continuous professional development of the school administrator.

Fig. 7.1. presents a model of the recommendations arising from the research findings that will assist those involved in the development of policies and the future development of the role of the school administrator. This includes meeting the recommendations of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN 2007) for a 20/20 vision of education.

7.2 Recommendations

A Development Plan for School Administrator

7. Build in Career & Progression & Development Path for School Administrators	8. Implement the Recommendations Included in this Study	1. Redefine the Role of the School Secretary
6. Reward in line with contribution to School Effectiveness	**School Administrator 2011 - 2020**	2. Develop New Job Descriptions for School Administrator
5. Establish a New Performance Management System	4. Establish a proper Grading Structure	3. Identify the Skills and Knowledge Required

Fig. 7.1 A Development Plan for School Administrator

7.2.1 Recommendations for School Secretaries in CDVEC

1) Organise themselves into a cohesive group of professional administrators to enable them to cater for their professional development.

2) Gain representation at organisational and branch level of IMPACT Trade Union and the Admin Staff Association to cater for their personal welfare and work needs as 'school administrators'.

3) Utilise fully the services provided by IMPACT trade union such as

      i.   Representation at sector and national levels

     ii.   Awareness of the training on offer to the membership

   iii.   Awareness of an awards system that recognises group achievement of members through the National Partnership Forum (NPF)

   iv.   That IMPACT Trade Union support any training that 'school administrators' require to carry out their role

    v.   That IMPACT Trade Union has an address system in place that administrative staff can use for support or to address any work related issues they may have

4) Take account of the fact that a review study had commenced prior to the on-set of the banking crisis to look at another re-structuring of administrative posts in CDVEC to address how the structures at Head Office and schools do not meet the changing demands encountered at both levels. The terms of reference for a quantitative study had been set and a chairperson put in place.

5) Demand that another study on the re-structuring of administrative grades in the schools and colleges of CDVEC should be a qualitative study that includes interviews with school administrators and principals. This study should commence in the schools and colleges first with an observation study to reflect the current situation for administrative staff in schools and colleges. Another statistical quantitative study will only produce the same results as the Rochford Review (2002).

6) Take account of how a review on re-structuring of the administrative grades should take account of the need for a senior administrative

grade in the schools and colleges to assist principals in an advisory role.

7) Establish a communication link with IMPACT to be kept up to date on the developments of their role.

8) Design a continuous professional development programme to include an emphasis on accessing the expert pool of knowledge available from senior school administrators.

9) That administrators avail of up-skilling and training in order to compete within the CDVEC system and if needs be in the business world.

10) Hold an annual meeting with CDVEC Head Office to discuss the needs of administrative staff working at all centres

11) Ensure that staff on Contracts of Indefinite Duration (CID) in schools/colleges and other centres enjoy the same benefits as full-time staff being allowed avail of the computer purchase scheme, entitlement to increments and appropriate payment scales.

12) Realise the value of constructive Performance Management Development System (PMDS) and that it be conducted properly beyond a box ticking exercise.

13) Establish a professional association for school administrators

- To provide access to continuing professional development
- To cater for the welfare needs of administrators
- To provide a newsletter covering relevant issues
- To provide a means of networking

- To provide access to up-to-date research information and publications in relation to their role

7.2.2 Recommendations for School Principals

1) Provide in-house training particularly in the IT area to up-skill in the specific areas as discussed between the school administrator and principal.

2) Grant school administrators three days annually for up-skilling in order to improve their competencies for the benefit of the school.

3) Restore the PMDS system as a constructive tool for the development of 'school administrators and maintenance staff'.

4) Establish a new more senior grade of administrator to advise senior staff members on areas of Budget, Health and Safety, Section 29, Garda Vetting and Building's matters that frees up the principal to concentrate on other aspects of their role.

5) Arrange for an annual meeting between administrative staff in CDVEC Head Office and schools to discuss how each can assist one another and gain a better understanding of their roles.

7. 2.3 Recommendations for IMPACT Trade Union

1) Seek to gain a full understanding of the effects of the recommendations of the Rochford Review (2002) on the 'school secretaries' and schools.

2) Commence a follow on review of Rochford (2002) report immediately. The review should firstly commence in the schools and colleges. The review should involve interviews with the administrative staff, principals and other stakeholders.

3) Use the findings of this study to act as a basis for information on what the role entails and the skills and knowledge required to perform the role.

4) Regain the confidence of 'school administrators' (new change of title) through better communication of the services available to the schools and colleges of CDVEC.

5) Encourage school administrators to become members of the 'school secretaries' national branch.

6) Commitment to supporting the professional development of 'school administrators'.

7.2.4   Recommendations for CDVEC Management

1)   Develop a National FETAC Level 6 Award in Education Administration similar to that devised by the School of Education Administration in the UK with progression routes to 3rd Level.

2)   Change title of 'school secretary' to 'school administrator' better describing the role in the 21st Century.

3) Create a Learning Organisation that will take into account for school administrators, individual training and development, rewards and recognition, vision and strategy and individual and team development.

4) Provide in-house training for 'school administrators' in IT, Finance and interpersonal skills to meet the current demands of the role.

5) Make training available in a central location or at two different centres one on the Northside and the other on the Southside of the City or at a City Centre location or through an arrangement with County Dublin VEC.

6) Produce a new job description for the role of the 'school administrator'.

7) Organise an annual day for all administrative staff of CDVEC to facilitate an improvement in communication, better working relations and processes.

8) Accommodate the role of administrator by recognising three main categories of staff in schools and colleges

1) Academic Staff
2) Administrators
3) Maintenance Staff

9) Change the career development section of the staff handbook to on-going professional development for academic, administrators, craft workers, general operatives and other related grades.

7.3 Conclusion

The research study just completed has provided a very challenging and interesting experience for the researcher. It is hoped that this study will be of great value to the many stakeholders who are in different ways depending on the 'school secretary/administrator' to help them achieve their objectives. Even though the researcher has worked in the system for many years the amount of new information and insights gained on completing the research was very significant. It is expected that the recommendations in the study will be of immense benefit to 'school secretaries/administrators' in the CDVEC in the future. Many of the recommendations can be implemented in due course.

One of the most heart-warming aspects of the study was the degree of interest shown by all those who were involved in the research. It is clear that the role of the 'school secretary/administrator' has been for a long time taken for granted with little or no review or improvement. It is equally clear that the role of the school 'secretary/administrator' is absolutely crucial to the effective running of the vocational education system. The completion of this study will provide current and future policy makers with new information and insights that can be used to up-grade the position and provide continuous professional development for the job holders.
It is the earnest wish of the researcher that this study will contribute in some small way to a revision of the role and to addressing some of the issues that undermine the effectiveness of the 'school secretary'.

Some of the highlights of the study were the visits to the schools and colleges in CDVEC to meet with the 'school secretaries' and principals and the very warm welcome received by the author. Some of the most interesting findings included the study undertaken in New York that showed many similarities with 'school secretaries/administrators' in CDVEC. The main differences were in investment in professional development and

training and their professional pedagogical licence. The research in the UK discovered that there is a Certificate in School Administration and a Diploma in School Efficiency provided by the School of Educational Administration in the UK. This finding led to one of the most interesting developments in the research, which was the interest in Ireland in developing a FETAC National Certificate in School Administration at Level 6 with progression routes to third level.

The role of CDVEC in the national economic recovery plan is going to take on greater importance, as skills and education experiences have to be made available to a high number of students who can make a significant difference to the re-building of a new economy. This means that there is an urgent need to examine the recommendations in this study and where possible make changes to best support the school administrator in his/her work. They need to be better equipped to provide the best possible learning environment for the students who will play an important role in the National Recovery Programme. The Irish economy needs more high skilled and adaptable employees across all categories of workers and sectors of employment over the next decade. The researcher is optimistic and is inspired by the words of President Barack Obama on his visit to Ireland in 2011 when he encouraged the Irish people to believe in themselves on stating, "*is fēidir linn*".

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Appendices

Appendix A
Research Population, **Date and Location of Interview**

Date	Role	Location	Code
08-04-2009	School Secretary	CDVEC School	SJ
08-04-2009	School Secretary	CDVEC School	SM
16-04-2009	School Secretary	CDVEC School	SI
20-05-2009	Principal	CDVEC School	PE
18 -06-009	Principal	CDVEC School	PF
19-06-2009	Principal	CDVEC School	PG
30-06-2009	Principal	CDVEC School	PH
02-06-2009 - 06-06-2009	School Secretaries x 5 Chairperson UFT	New York, USA	P1-P5
30-06-2009	Principal	CDVEC School	PI
01-07-2009	Principal	CDVEC School	PJ
03-07-2009	School Secretary x 3	CDVEC School	SN1,SN2,SN3
03-07-2009	Principal	CDVEC School	PK
03-07-2009	School Secretary	CDVEC School	SE
13-07-2009	Principal	CDVEC School	PL
31-03-2010	Chairman School of Educational Admin	By Phone	A1
19-04-2010	Teaching Staff x 3	CDVEC Centre	A 2,A3,A4
26-05-2010	Student Surveys	CDVEC School	OS
17-05-2010	Co-ordinator	CDVEC School	O1
19-05-2010	Education and Training Officer	CDVEC School	OT
01-06-2010	Senior Official	IMPACT T.U Headquarters	A5
14-06-2010	Guidance Counsellor/Director of Adult Education	CDVEC School	O2
14-06-2010	Disability Offices x 2	CDVEC School	OD1-2
18-06-2010	Teacher/Tutor	CDVEC School	O3
18-06-2009	Teacher/ Co-ordinator	CDVEC School	O4
18-06-2009	Teacher/Co-ordinator	CDVEC School	O5
29-06-2010	Maintenance Staff x 4	CDVEC School	OM1 –OM4
13-07-2010	Senior Member of Academic Management CDVEC	CDVEC Head Office	A6

Appendix B

Plain Language Statement Professional Doctoral Programme (Ed.)

1. Introduction to the Research Study

My name is Noreen Connolly O'Prey and I am in the third year of a four year Professional Doctoral Programme (Ed.) in Dublin City University. I am currently undertaking research for my final thesis, which is based around the 'Role and Impact of the School Secretary/Administrator in the Education System'. I am a School Administrator in one of CDVEC's second level schools. The reason for this research stems from my own assumptions of the role we play in education, the changes that have taken place over the last decade and the need for professional development in this area to withstand the challenges for the future. I am anxious to find out how other school administrators feel in relation to their role and how school principals and other management and educational bodies feel about the role. I hope also to be able to do a comparative study on the role in the USA and UK.

11. Details of what involvement in the Research Study will require

I am using a qualitative research methodology using an interview method of data collection. I hope that the interview will be more of a conversation about the role lasting between 45 to 60 minutes at a time and place suitable to the participant.   I would appreciate the permission of the participant to tape this interview and I will return a fully word -processed copy to them which they can feel free to amend if necessary.

111. Potential risks to participants from involvement in the Research Study (if greater than that encountered in everyday life)

I guarantee that all information given by the participants in this research will be treated as strictly confidential and used only for the purpose of this study. In writing up the final thesis I will protect the anonymity of all participants at all times. The confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations.

IV. Benefits (direct or indirect) to participants from involvement in the Research Study

All participants in the Research Study will receive a copy of the findings and recommendations from the research. It is also my intention to send a copy of my findings to VEC's, the Irish Vocational Education Association, IMPACT Trade Union and the Department of Education and Science. I would hope that this research would also be published in Education journals/Education literature to highlight the role the education

administrator plays in the education system and in turn that they would benefit from any outcomes of this research.

V. Advice as to whether or not data is to be destroyed after a minimum period

All transcripts of interviews and tapes will be destroyed as soon as the researcher receives confirmation from Dublin City University that the research has been accepted for the thesis of the Professional Doctoral Programme (Ed).

VI. Statement that involvement in the Research Study is voluntary

Participation in the Research Study is entirely voluntary and should the participant need to withdraw from the study at any time before all stages of the study is completed they can without feeling there is any penalty for doing so.

If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact: The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o. Office of the Vice-President for Research, Dublin City University, Dublin 9. Tel 01 7008000

Appendix C

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Professional Doctoral Programme (Ed.)

1. **Research Study Title**

   The current working title for my study is based around the

   'Role and Impact of the School Secretary/Administrator in the Education System '.

   The University department involved is the School of Education Studies, Dublin City University, Collins Avenue, Dublin 9.

   The principal investigator in this research is
   Noreen Connolly O'Prey, BBS, MSC, Education and Training Management.

11. **Clarification of the purpose of the research**

   I am working as a school administrator in one of CDVEC's (City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee's) schools. I am in the third year of study for a Professional Doctoral Programme in Education and my research for my final thesis is based on the above title. I am using a qualitative research methodology using an interview method of data collection, which I hope will be more of a conversation about the role. I am anxious to find out how other administrators feel about their role, the changes that have taken place over the last number of years, the impact they feel they have in the education system and where they see this role for the future or any other aspect around this area that they may like to add. My study will also involve interviewing school principals and management involved in education, asking them similar questions as to how they see the role. I am hoping that I can also do a comparative study on the role resulting from the literature uncovered to date in the UK and USA.

111. **Confirmation of particular requirements as highlighted in the Plain Language Statement**

   With the permission of participants I am hoping that the interviews can be taped where a full-transcript of the interview will be returned to the participants for them to amend if necessary.

Participant –please complete the following (Circle Yes or No for each question)

Have you read or had read to you the Plain Language Statement?	Yes/No
Do you understand the information provided?	Yes/No
Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this Study?	Yes/No
Are you aware that your interview will be audiotaped?	Yes/No

IV   Confirmation that involvement in the Research Study is voluntary

I wish to advise all participants in the study that participation is entirely voluntary and should you feel the need to withdraw from the study at any time before all stages of the Research Study is completed you have complete freedom to do so without feeling the risk of any penalty for doing so.

V   I wish to advise all participants that all information provided during the course of this research will be treated as strictly confidential and used for the purpose of this study only. I also guarantee total anonymity of all participants at all times to include writing up the final thesis. Confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations.

VI   I have read and understood the information in this form. My questions and concerns have been answered by the researcher, and I have a copy of this consent form. Therefore, I consent to take part in this research project.

Participants Signature: _____

Name in Block Capitals: _____

Witness: _____

Date: _____

Appendix D

Findings From Pilot Study

Q1 **How do you feel about your Role?**

- The position is a front line position (first point of contact).
- It involves a broad area of communications that requires an in-depth knowledge of the education system.
- References were made to how this area of communication included the Department of Education and Science, FETAC, Other Agencies, Partnerships, All Departments in Head Office together with the communication involved in the school to academic staff, students, administrative and maintenance staff and communication with the general public.
- A colossal amount of paperwork and the different procedures to be followed.
- The role has also an investigative nature.
- The role requires a professional image as this could have a positive or negative impact on enrolments and school image.

Q2 **What Impact do you feel you have in the education? system?**

- There were mixed feelings on this question from having a strong impact, to having an impact in a different way to the teachers, to not having a huge impact but being central to it because there was a system in place.

- An integral part of the school system and not on the peripheral

Q3   **Has the role changed over the last decade? How?**

- Communications in an Educational Environment very important
- Need for collaboration through all departments
- Responsibility, and Increase in Accountability.
- Increase in Electronic Technology
- Increase and changes in workload
- Increase in Legislation
- Different student population

Q4   **What's important to you?**

- Pride in job
- Serious/Conscientious
- Good impression to the Public – Students come first
- To do a good Job and have job satisfaction.

Q5   **How do you describe your role? Do you like the title 'School Secretary'?**

Description

- Busy, Stressful, Enjoyment, Time-Consuming, Hard, Varied, Great Buzz/Would not like to change it.
- The role is jack-of-all-trades. The phone never stops ringing. Looking after everything. Invoicing, Post, Finance. You need to be adaptable.
- Knowledge of Education System required. Exams and what is happening in a school. Things Happen annually.
- Knowledge of CDVEC System very important to see if we are following their Mission Statement
- Knowledge of when each function performed should commence and end.

Title

- In two schools the term school secretary is never used and reference was made to the fact that we are called administrators in the CDVEC Staff Handbook.

- In the other two schools the admin staff were referred to as 'school secretaries' but did not feel the title adequately described the role.

Q6   **Where does it fit into the education system?**

- Most participants felt that this question was already answered in Q.2.

Q7   **What would you like to see?**

- **Key points** – Communications – Collaboration – Training – Recognition. Good working relations.
- Should attend some part of the staff meeting
- Not being kept in the loop on what is happening and makes us appear unprofessional

Q8   **Is there anything else you, as a participant in the research would like to highlight?**

- Training
- Professional Development
- Additional Administrative Support
- Networking
- More recognition of the role
- That admin staff working in Head Office would spend some time in a school and visa-a-versa.

Appendix E

Research Questions

These questions are just a guideline to allow us talk about the role of the 'school secretary' and their impact in the education system. The focus of this interview is on how the 'school secretary' assists/supports all stakeholders in their role and how they can assist the student during their time at school/college.

1) How do you feel about your role?

2) Do you feel the school secretary has an impact in the education system?

3) How has the role changed over the last decade?

4) What's important to you in your role?

5) How do you describe the role?

6) Do you feel the title 'school secretary' adequately describes the role, or what term would best describe the role?

7) What qualities or skills do you feel the school secretary needs to carry out their role?

8) In view of the role school secretaries/administrators play in education and the skills required to do so – do you think administration is a specialist field?

9) The pilot study undertaken highlighted the need for better Communication, Collaboration and Training in order to carry out the role more effectively. How do you think it could be improved?

10) Are school secretaries prepared to meet the forecast of the IVEA (2008) report ('A New Age of Challenge and Opportunity for VEC's discusses the confluence of developments that were taking place in the education system and how they will affect the Vocational Education sector) that estimates that eighty-four per cent of the up-skilling prescribed in the national skills strategy of some 500,000 people by the year 2020 will lie within the VEC remit?

11) With secretaries, principals and all stakeholders the areas of Networking and Professional Development for 'school secretaries' was discussed. How important do you think this is for them?

12) What are your views on the Rochford Review (2002) on the restructuring of administrative grades in CDVEC?

13) Is there anything else you would like to add as a participant in the research?

APPENDIX F

Permission Request to Carry Out Study

7th February 2008

Dear CEO,

I am currently undertaking a four-year research programme at Dublin City University on a part-time basis outside of working time. I am in the second year of the programme. For the next part of this programme I am required to undertake a ten thousand word pilot research study. The area of research I have chosen to undertake is on the role and impact of the School Secretary in the education system. I am financing this research myself and all of it is carried out in my own time.

I would like permission to be able to contact the other school secretaries in CDVEC schools and colleges firstly by questionnaire and then through follow up interviews. Participation in this research will be totally at the discretion of the school secretaries themselves as to whether they choose to participate or not. I also hope to open this research up to the school secretaries in the other vocational schools around the country. This may not be required for the pilot project. The deadline for the submission of the research project was initially the 31st March 2008 but recently an extension was granted to June. I am hoping to complete mine as near as possible to the March deadline. All information received will be treated and respected as strictly confidential and only gathered for the purpose of the research project.

I would very much appreciate your permission to carry out this research. I look forward to hearing from you at your convenience.

Yours sincerely,

Noreen Connolly O'Prey
Researcher

APPENDIX G

Letter To: CDVEC School Administrators/School Secretaries Inviting them to Participate in Research

March 2009

Re: Post Graduate Research on the 'Role and Impact of the School Administrator/Secretary in the Education System'.

Dear Colleague,

For those of you that do not know me I am a Grade IV in …….College. I am currently undertaking research on the 'Role and Impact of the School Administrator/Secretary in the education system. I am in the third-year of a four- year part-time Professional Doctoral programme in Dublin City University. Having carried out a pilot study in this area, I am now hoping to extend this research for my final thesis and invite administrative staff working in schools and colleges in the vocational sector to take part. I am also inviting school principals to take part in this research. I am currently researching developments that are taking place internationally in this area. The research methodology is a qualitative one using an interview/discussion approach that would last for thirty to forty minutes approximately.

I would like to invite you to take part in this research, which I hope will be beneficial in highlighting the role that the school administrator/secretary plays in the education system. All those taking part can be assured that all information will be treated as strictly confidential and used only for the purpose of this research.

I would appreciate you passing a copy of this letter on to other administrative staff in your school. If you would like to take part, I would be grateful if you could complete the attached reply form and return to me before the 30th April 2009. I can then discuss the research in greater detail and arrange a suitable time.

I would like to thank you for taking the time to read my letter and I look forward to hearing from you in the near future.

Yours sincerely,

Noreen Connolly O'Prey
Research Student

APPENDIX H

Letter to: CDVEC School Principals
Inviting them to take part in the research

March 2009

Re: Post Graduate Research on the 'Role and Impact of the School
Secretary/Administrator in the Education System'.

Dear Principal,

For those of you that do not know me I am a Grade IV in …….College. I am currently undertaking research on the 'Role and Impact of the School Administrator/Secretary in the Education System'. I am in the third-year of a four-year part-time Professional Doctoral Programme in Dublin City University. Having carried out a pilot study in this area, I am now hoping to extend this research for my final thesis and invite Principals and Administrative staff working in schools and colleges in the vocational sector to take part. I am also looking at developments that are taking place internationally in this area. The research methodology is a qualitative one using an interview/discussion approach that would last for thirty to forty minutes approximately.

I would like to invite you to take part in this research, which I hope will be beneficial in highlighting the role that the school administrator/secretary plays in the education system. All those taking part can be assured that all information will be treated as strictly confidential and used only for the purpose of this research. If you would like to take part, I would be grateful if you could complete the attached reply form and return to me before the 30[th] April 2009. I can then discuss the research in greater detail and arrange a suitable time.

I would like to thank you for taking the time to read my letter and I look forward to hearing from you in the very near future.

Yours sincerely,

Noreen Connolly O'Prey
Research Student

Return Slip From: School Secretary/Principal TO APPENDIX G/H

Re: Post Graduate Research Interview

'The Role and Impact of the School Administrator/Secretary in the Education System'.

To: Noreen Connolly O'Prey

c/o. ………. College

From: _____

College: _____

I am interested in taking part in the research and look forward to hearing from you to arrange a suitable time and date.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Appendix I- Further Information on Analysis Step 3

Research Questions /Interview with the Chairman of the School of Educational Administration - 31st March 2010

"The Role and Impact of the School Secretary/Administrator in the Education System" Ed.D – Professional Doctoral Programme – Dublin City University (DCU)

The following are intended to act as a guideline only to allow us talk freely about the role of the school secretary/administrator in the education system.

1) The School of Educational Administration – What brought it about?

2) How long is the school in operation?

3) The National Certificate of Educational Administration course – how many school administrators/secretary's do the course each year? Is this for second level schools?

4) Do School Principals encourage School Administrator's to do this course?

5) Is it a requirement to gain employment as School Administrator's?

6) Where is the development of the Diploma course – in School Business?

7) Is this a one- year course?

8) Who certifies this course?

9) Is this for the UK only or is it offered in other parts of Europe?

10) Is the title 'school secretary' used or 'school administrator'?

11) The changes that have taken place over the last decade – how has this affected school administrator's/secretary's?

12) Student Enrolment – Number of School Administrators in schools?

13) Networking – News Letter – how successful is this?

14) Very interesting the school purchasing site? How successful is this? Is it a form of contract where companies tender to get contract?

15) Development of Articles – so interesting and appropriate in today's climate.

16) Anything else you would like to add as a participant in the research?

Interview with the Chairman of the School of Educational Administration

The director explained how schools in England had control of their own finances and where a lot of training was carried out for school bursar's who looked after 'school budgets' in the school but how little training was done for any other staff in the '*school office*'. He described how the title of the school came about to reflect that the organisation would be focused on '*administration*' in the widest sense and not just on the work of the bursar. This would contrast with Gunter (2001, p. 89) who described the growth in the provision of courses in educational administration to support the learning process that was undertaken by teachers and post-holders.

The director explained how he himself had been a teacher and later a senior lecturer who had moved into '*business*' and was aware of the way '*businesses*' were administered and the way '*schools*' were administered. This would concur with Buckley and Monks (2008, p. 147) who describes how a programme designed by DCU was both an educational and developmental experience for managers who are working in rapidly changing organisations. The director explained how he had also witnessed '*school administration*' as the chair of a parent teacher association (PTA) in a large private school, as a school governor and as a parent and saw the need for '*professional development*' for '*school administrators*'.

He informed the research of how the school was set up in 2004 and the first students enrolled for the one year National Certificate of Educational Administration in 2005. He described the education system in the UK as Primary (5-11 years) and Secondary (11-18 years), Further Education (post school but below degree and diploma Level) and High Education (University Level). He described how this course grew out of the need for '*professional development*' and '*recognition*' for 'school administrators'

working in primary and secondary schools. He also described how they had moved away from the title 'school secretary' that was considered an old fashioned name and used the title 'administrator'. This would concur with the views of most stakeholders interviewed in CDVEC.

The director commented on how schools funded by local authorities that 'school administrators' tend to have poor pay and poor contracts of employment and how most are not unionised, although there are three unions – Unison, Voce and GMB which recruit 'school administrators'. This would not concur with the findings from the 'administrative staff' interviewed in the schools in CDVEC or the 'school secretaries' of UFT. He stated how 'school administrators' undertake this course themselves that is certified by the IFA Institute of Business Management to gain recognition. The course is done through distance learning and provides 'administrators' the opportunity to interact with other 'administrators' on the Internet.

The Director described how they were currently in the process of the development of a one -year Diploma course in 'School Efficiency', which grew out of the need for progression from the National Certificate of Educational Administration course. This course was due to be available from September 2010 and also certified by the IFA Institute of Business Management. This would address the forecast of the Expert Group report on the Future Skills Needs (EGFSN, 2007, p. 10) who described how if there was no policy change, educational attainment projections for 2020 would show a shortage of qualified professionals at NFQ Levels 6 and 7.

The director also explained the development of 'networking' by the school, but described how it was not used and developed by 'school administrators' in the way that he would like it to be. He described how 'administrators' don't communicate with each other beyond their own school, and the school of educational administration (SEA) is the only body that has some way of

doing this, through its website www.admin.org.uk and through the weekly free news service it runs www.schools.co.uk/subscribe.html through Hamilton House Mailings Ltd and the income from the courses.

Appendix J- Research Survey with Students

'The Role and Impact of the 'School Secretary' in the VEC Education System'

I am carrying out qualitative research for my dissertation (Ed. D) on the role of the 'school secretary' in the vocational education system. This survey is designed to find out how the 'school secretary' assists students during their time in the college with a view to improving services for the future and highlighting the role of the 'school secretary'. I very much appreciate the time you have taken to take part in this survey.

1. **How does the 'school secretary' assist you as a student in the college?**

   _____

   _____

   _____

2. **How did the 'school secretary' assist you during the time you were applying for a place in the college?**

   _____

   _____

   _____

3. **How would you describe the role of the 'school secretary'?**

   _____

   _____

   _____

4. **Could the secretarial service be improved for the future?**

   _____

   _____

5. **What are the most important duties carried out by the 'school secretary'?**

_____

_____

_____

6. **Do you think the title of 'school secretary' adequately describes their role?**

_____

_____

_____

7. **When would you look to deal with the 'school secretary'?**

_____

_____

_____

8. **What do you require the 'school secretary' to do for you?**

_____

_____

_____

9. **Is there anything else you would like to add as a participant in the research?**

_____

_____ _____

_____

Appendix K – Phase 2 of the Study

Step 6 (p.73) –   **Interview with Senior Official IMPACT Trade Union – VEC Administrative Branch**

1st June 2010

Q1   **What changes have been introduced into the work practice of the school secretary?**

The research has highlighted the frontline position the 'school secretary' holds in schools/colleges and the pivotal role they play. The research has also highlighted the changes that have taken place particularly since the introduction of the 1998 Education Act and the 2001 Vocational Amendment Act that has impinged on their role to include

- An increase in workload
- Increase in report writing
- Increase in accountability – finance, record-keeping
- Increase in Education Legislation, Policy Documents
- A colossal increase in paperwork from DES, FETAC, CDVEC Head Office, Partnerships, Education Programmes/Funding
- Increase in Information Technology – e.mail/internet

Q2   **There is a need for the broadening of the structures in schools and colleges to withstand the new developments and nature of the workload now undertaken by administrative staff. The Rochford Review (2002) recommended that an independent study be carried out in the schools and colleges and now eight years later has not happened. What are your views on this?**

Q3   **The research has highlighted the need for training and development for administrative staff to withstand the challenges they are facing in their role. The training that has been highlighted is as follows. What role does IMPACT play in providing Training for their members?**

- More sophisticated IT training to include statistical presentation of data and database methods
- Financial Training

- Interpersonal Skills Development – to deal with various situations 'school secretaries encounter '
- Education Legislation
- First Aid Training
- Counselling Skills

Q4   **The research has highlighted the following issues raised by 'school secretaries' in relation to attending the training courses provided by CDVEC. What are your views on the following?**

- The difficulty in taking time off to do the occasional training courses offered due to the fact that schools are very busy places and the workload remains/increases
- The location of training courses – usually on the Southside of the City in relation to CDVEC – with traffic etc. the need for central locations to be considered
- In the USA the UFT have occasional per diem Secretaries that act as locums who have licences to operate when 'school secretaries' are absent.

Q5   **What are your views on the need for professional development for 'school secretaries' so that their role is seen in a more professional light and do you feel the title school secretary adequately describes the role?**

Q6   **Is there a need for increased communication and collaboration to assist 'school secretaries' in their role? Should there be an Open Forum where each can discuss his/her needs with administrative staff in CDVEC Head Office and Schools? Is there a need for a support system to be put in place for more recognition? What are your views on these three issues?**

The research has also highlighted the need for greater recognition of the role of the 'school secretary/administrator' in CDVEC Schools/Colleges and the need for some sort of support system to be put in place for them.

Research in the USA has highlighted that the top priority of UFT (School Secretaries chapter) is professional development for its members. They provide

- The release of a 'school secretary' (Chairperson of the 'school secretaries' Chapter of UFT) two days per week to look after all issues relating to their members
- They provide an office in their Headquarters to use

- UFT have an Annual Day for all their Chapters that includes in-service training and guest speakers on issues relating to 'school secretaries' and other members.
- They assist 'school secretaries' with funding towards training and education
- They have an 'awards ceremony' for the 'school secretaries' one from each borough of New York State
- School Secretaries require a licence to operate in schools and colleges that is acquired by passing examinations that register them as Professional Pedagogicals
- UFT 'school secretaries' receive qualification allowances for degree courses undertaken
- They have their own website and newsletters

Q7   **Are there any plans for the new job descriptions being issued to 'school secretaries' and management that reflect the current duties being carried out in schools and colleges?**

Q8   **Is there anything else that you would like to add as a participant in the research?**

Appendix L –Phase 3 of Research Study

Step 7 (p. 73) -   Interview Questions with Senior Member
of CDVEC Academic Staff

13th July 2010.

The following questions provide a sample of the issues raised in the research with the stakeholders mentioned.

Q1   How important do you feel training is for School Secretaries /administrators to carry out their roles effectively and what role does CDVEC play in providing this training for administrative staff?

We discussed the area of training and what was needed to carry out our roles effectively. Some of the areas discussed were as follows:

Finance, Public Relations, IT (keeping on top of skills/Data Protection/Freedom of Information – Online applications and replies to the Public, Microsoft, Access, Excel – More sophisticated presentation packages –Pie Charts), Public Service Role and Image, Marketing, Interpersonal Skills for dealing with International Students (Understanding their culture and the need for them to understand our culture), Dealing with difficult parents/people, Dealing with students with special needs, Education Legislation, Counselling Skills and First Aid.

Location of training centre was also discussed and suggested the need for a central location or one on each side of the city.

It was also mentioned the difficulty of getting time off to do the training in some instances staff are on their own in the colleges and of the busy nature of schools. Some felt a little more encouragement was needed from principals to encourage them to do the training.

Suggestion was also made that training could be in house. One or two hours a week particularly in the IT area and it was mentioned in a couple of instances that it could include FETAC modules.

In an interview with two Disability Officers they informed the research that they provide and encourage schools to participate in training for all

staff who are dealing with students with special educational needs to include academic, administrative and maintenance staff.

Q2 How important is Communication and Collaboration to assist 'school secretaries/administrators' in their role? The research has highlighted the following

      a) The need for an open forum staff day between administrative staff in Head Office and Schools where each can discuss their needs and gain a better understanding of the problems that both sides encounter.

      Reference was made to notices coming from HR Office that were for Academic and Non-Academic Staff and felt that a better wording would be Academic, Administrative and Maintenance Staff.

      Reference was also made that when HR are writing to administrative staff or indeed other staff members – their Christian name should be used instead of Dear Ms. Mr, etc.

      Reference was also made to the fact that administrative staff in the schools do not know the HR Manager and it would be nice for him to pay a visit to the schools.

      b) Administrative Staff in some schools attend staff meetings that take place 2/3 times a year and find them very beneficial for Communication, Collaboration, and teamwork purposes. They also feel it gives a sense of recognition and value as a staff member. In some instances they are there for the full staff meeting taking the minutes and in other instances they attend for the first hour. In some schools this does not happen and administrative staff believe they would benefit from being there for some part of the staff meeting to be kept in the loop on issues that might involve their role. Reference was also made to the fact that the Senior Porter of the school should also attend.

Q3 **What are your views on the fact that the research has highlighted the frontline position and pivotal role of the school secretary and how the changes that had taken place particularly since the introduction of the 1998 Education Act and the 2001 Vocational Amendment Act has impinged on their role?**

- An increase in workload
- An increase in report writing
- An increase in Accountability and Responsibility
- An increase in Education Legislation, Policy Documents
- Knowledge of the School Development Plan
- Knowledge of Education Welfare Board
- An increase in Section 29 appeals – increase in minute taking at BOM meetings
- A colossal increase in paperwork from DES, FETAC, CDVEC Head Office, Partnerships, Education Programmes/Funding
- A change in student population to include international students and students with special needs
- An awareness of their Public Service Role – Professional Image
- An increased awareness of the Role of the School in the Community
- An Increase in Information Technology – e.mail/internet/Databases/returns through Internet.
- Knowledge of BTEI, VTOS and FETAC Systems
- Knowledge of the Role of the Guidance Counsellors – National Council for Special Needs (College Secretary is the person with an in-depth knowledge of the system and information at her fingertips)
- Knowledge of the role of the Adult Education Director – (You can have confidence that what is being told to the parent or a member of the public is accurate information.)
- Teachers referred to the role and office as providing a great source of comfort in the school where teachers and students could go for assistance.
- An increase in meeting the needs of all stakeholders to include servicing the needs of all departments of Head Office

Q4 **Do you think the role requires specialist skills and knowledge?**

An interview held with the Education/Training officer provided a deep insight into the needs of their students who attend our schools and colleges. It also provided a deeper understanding and awareness

of the services they provide and what their vision is for the future for the students in terms of personal development, training and course development.

Similar information was also provided in the interview with two Disability officers who currently deal with PLC students in eight schools/colleges who also offer support for all students in the school/college if required.

Q5   **Do you think there is a need for the broadening of the current administrative structures in the schools and colleges to withstand the new developments and the nature of the workload undertaken by 'school secretaries'?**

Reference was made to the fact that there is no promotion for administrative staff within schools and this can result in them becoming static and stagnant – a suggestion was made for the need for Training to Middle Management level where on completion they could be recognised for promotion and that would make them a more valued person in the VEC and flexible to go to other centres and apply their skills.

Q6   **Is there a correct title for administrative staff working in the schools and colleges of CDVEC?**

The majority of interviews undertaken do not feel the title 'school secretary' describes the role administrative staff carry out in schools and colleges. It is seen as outdated and old fashioned. Reference was also made to this in light of their image in the Public Service role they perform.

Q7   **Do you feel the leadership styles exercised by school/college principals is a factor in determining the role that the school secretary/administrator plays and the impact they have?**

Principals referred to the supportive role school secretaries/administrators gave to them and of the depth and breadth of knowledge and vision they require to do the job.

Reference was made to the fact that they were an under valued resource and if treated and used properly they were vital to the smooth running of the school. They impact on culture and ethos of school and how the senior person can create the right environment for the school.

Principals also referred to the need for students to have access to the office to deal with the various needs they have.

Reference was also made to how the modern era has crept up on schools and the impact it has on workloads.

Q8 **How can 'school secretaries/administrators' best meet the needs of all stakeholders?**

Students who participated in a survey on how they saw the role

How Secretary Assists you while in College: Helps, Organises, Finds, Supplies, Stamps, Types, Gives information, Registration, Timetables

Applying for a place in the college: Helpful, Informative, Explanatory, Kind, Friendly, Diligent, Organised, Assists, Link, Key Person

Describes Role: Busy, Stressful, Hectic, Difficult, Important, Overworked, Efficient, Organised, Assists, Link, Key Person,

Improvements: Be More Available, Office Open, Expand Services, More Accessible, More Photocopying Services, Delegate, More Responsibility,

Most Important Duties: Dealing with questions, problems, be quick, be there for people, maintain order, give information, timetables, telephone, letters, forms/photocopies, assist Principal, first point of contact, facilitate, record minutes

Does Title School Secretary Describe Role: No does a lot more than people think, Most Definitely, School Co-ordinator, Administrator Describes much better, Outdated refers to an era that did not encompass as many facets of college life as today

What do you look for the School Secretary to do for you: Problems, Attendance, Form Filling, References, Letters, Rooms, Timetables, Change of details on the computer, Photocopying, Appointments, Information, Notes stamped, First Aid, Guidance, Documents, Applications, Grants, Pass on Messages to Tutors, Did not require anything.

Anything else you would like to add: Does a good job, thank you for your help throughout the year, Good to keep on top of things

with new ideas, surprised at the volume of work and demanding nature of the role, Diverse student body and teachers which is additional to knowledge and technical skills, has to be above all a people friendly person who gets on with students.

School Secretaries/Administrators made reference to servicing the mission statement of CDVEC and reference was also made to how sometimes this gets sidetracked with issues that they feel are sometimes not necessary and interfere with this.

Q9   (a) What is important to School Secretaries/Administrators in their work role? Administrators identified what is important to them in their jobs as

- They take pride in their role
- They take it serious
- They like to do a good job
- Achieving Job Satisfaction
- Providing a Professional Service
- Presenting a Professional Image to the Public
- Servicing the Mission Statement of CDVEC and the Needs of the School

(b) What skills are required to do the job? Stakeholders identified the skills they felt were important for the 'school secretary/administrator' to carry out their job as

- Communication
- IT
- Financial
- Delegation
- Interpersonal Skills
- Discretion
- Self-Assurance
- A Breadth of Vision
- Confidentiality
- Commonsense
- Trustworthiness
- Understanding the Methodology of Education

Q 11   The researcher explained the research undertaken in the USA with 'school secretaries' and in the UK with the Chairman of the School of Educational Administration to the interviewee and asked for their views on it?

Q12   Is there anything else that you would like to add as a participant in the research?

Appendix M – Additional Findings

Question 3 – How has the role changed over the last decade?

Summary: School secretaries and principals referred to the huge increase in paperwork that was coming from CDVEC Head Office, DES, FETAC and other agencies. Principals referred to the development of PLC courses where there was a whole '*admissions*' and '*administrative*' side to it. One teacher commented on the '*openness*' of the role *"we share information with you, you share information with us, much more collaborative with all the staff for the benefit of everybody" (O3)*

One 'school secretary' commented on how computerisation was supposed to reduce the amount of paperwork but felt it had created the opposite situation where everything done on the computer also required a hard copy. *"You can see I am running out of space, and the store room is full also" (SJ).* One principal made reference as to how these changes were influenced by external factors that had resulted with the networking of systems across the Department and VEC's *"we have technalised"*(*PG*)

Another Principal commented on how "*the modern era had crept up on them"(PK).* A 'school secretary' commented on how her predecessor was never allowed develop under the old regime. With the commencement of a new principal " *I took the cover of the computer, introduced new systems, opened up the office and brought it into the 21st century" (SM).* One principal referred to how the role of the 'school secretary' was much more '*challenging'(PF)* but that it should also be much more enjoyable. The OECD (2008) report spoke of the need for reform in the Public Service that was responsive, flexible, innovative that meets the needs of a modern, highly diversified, increasingly complex society and economy. That is moving from a mechanistic bureaucratic way of thinking (Morgan, 2006) to a more fluid and flexible organic way (Jarrett, 2008).

Reference was made to the change in '*student population*' to include a huge increase in '*international*' students and students with '*special needs*' for which there had been no training provided. " *We are now working in a multi-cultural society and we should be brought out to Head Office for training on how to deal with all the issues that international students may have*"(SN1). Another 'school secretary' made reference to how social welfare requirements are changing on a regular basis and how students on the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) knew more about their social welfare '*entitlements*' than the administrative staff dealing with student enquiries "*it makes us look very unprofessional because we are the first port of call when students come into the college and we are not aware of these changes*" (SN2). Reference was made of the need for the production of a handbook for 'school administrators' to deal with student entitlements (Trachman, 1993).

One principal referred to the sophisticated '*financial and IT systems*' and the whole '*accountability and reporting*' *(PH)* relationships that went with it. In contrast to this finding a 'school secretary' referred to this as a change that had not happened in their college where the '*finance system*'*(SE)* promised had not been rolled out to all CDVEC schools. The OECD (2008) report made reference to the need of '*networking and collaboration*' across all departments of the Public Service. This was further contextualised by one principal who described the paperwork in terms of ordering and payments that went with the '*enrolment of one thousand students and eighty teachers*' *(PF)*.

The research also uncovered the changes that had not taken place in the organisation. One school secretary with over ten years service and on a CID contract commented on how she was not entitled to participate in the staff computer purchase scheme, and how she was still on a part-time hourly rate despite her years of service. Another 'school secretary' commented on

how the 'intranet' system used in schools was not up-dated the way it should be.

School secretaries interviewed in New York made reference to the problems encountered due to changes in District Office personnel who co-ordinate the paperwork and are responsible for payment of teacher salaries and orders purchased in the schools. They commented on how their role was now much more complicated and how they had built up a rapport with their previous district personnel. Similar references were made by 'school secretaries' in CDVEC who all stressed the need for an 'annual day' where all administrative staff could get together and discuss the needs of each other. The Rochford Review (2002) recommended the need for better relationships between schools and Head Office. One school secretary in New York described how they were now more recognised because of their union "*you are not just a 'secretary' you are part of the United Federation of Teachers Union, just like every other title that comes under the UFT, so you see the 'secretary' is now getting more recognition by the Union and they are given more help with training*" (P4).

Appendix N – Additional Findings

Q5   Descriptions of the role of school secretary by stakeholders

An Important Role   *"an important role but unrecognised", "not enough recognition of the role"*   *(SI)*

First Port of Call   *"whether it is on the phone, by electronic mail, or in person". "frontline position".*

"for any source of information that I need in terms of administration or guidelines before going to the Principal or Deputy Principal"   *(O5)*

"It makes it easy for people to come and feel at home here. I mean there is a lot of foreign students here and one of the great things about …….is the way in which people mix together"   *(OT)*

"Non-national students get tremendous assistance from the 'school secretary' and it takes a lot of time. A different culture and that is a very comfortable and that is often their first pot of call"   *(O3)*

An Organising One   *"organising the whole business of the school" "organising exams", "organising the different systems that are in place"*

Taking Registrations   *"getting students into the school and making sure that they leave it with what they need"(SN2)*

Paperwork

"too much paperwork"

**The Ability to
Adapt**

"*the ability to adapt, prioritise and
reprioritise"*   *(SM)*

**The Ability to Change
Your Attitude**

"*when somebody asks me not in a
appropriate way to do something, I used to
feel annoyed, but by adjusting my attitude and
saying 'no problem' I found it a much easier
way of dealing with it, in most cases they
would come back and apologise later" (SM)*

Supportive Role

"*Providing a great source of comfort in the
school where teachers and students could go
for assistance"*   *(O3)*

Link Role/

*"Link between management and rest of the
school"(04)*

Liaison Role

"*Key person who liases with staff, students,
parents, members of the public and Head
Office on matters relating to the college"*
        (02)

Confidential Role

*"You know it tends to be very confidential and
that is a big thing for students"*
        (03)

**Understanding/
Awareness of Role**

*Interviews with disability officers and
education training officer provided a deep
understanding, and awareness, of their vision
for students***.**

Energetic Role	*"requires all your energy to be put into it", a lot of pressure, "hectic"* (SI)
Caring Role	*"we like to help"* (USA)
Need Patience	*"I think you need patience number one top of the list"* (USA)
Duties	*The following list was compiled from interviews*

- Dealing with 1800 students, 90 teacher faces, 5 maintenance staff with just 2.5 admin staff members
- Part-time Returns
- CID's (Contracts of Indefinite Duration)
- Monthly Attendance Reports
- Petty Cash
- Enrolment Fees
- Book Rental Scheme
- Uniforms
- Gaeltacht
- Lodgements
- Ordering and Purchasing
- Recording Minutes of Sub-Committee Meetings
- October Returns to DES (CIMS)
- Inputting Teachers on System
- Reminders to teachers on absolutely all kinds of things
- Phones constantly ringing
- Constant messages to teachers
- Dealing with students, parents, teachers and support staff in school office

- Typing for Principal and Deputy Principal

- Typing letters for HSC/Passport or whatever

- Record Keeping and Filing

- Assisting with examination processes

- Financial Analysis

- Management of IT Systems

Appendix O – Additional Findings

Sample of responses from Interviews with Teachers with Tutor/Co-ordinator Responsibilities

Q1   How would you see or describe the role of the 'school secretary'?

One school teacher who is also a tutor saw the role as a '*link*' between the management and the rest of the school.

> *"like somebody who plays a big part in letting us know and*
> *'informing' us of what is going on and keeping us 'in touch' with*
> *things as well. You know sometimes you don't want to*
> *go into the principal naturally for things but the secretary is a*
> *font of information".   (O3)*

Another school teacher who is also a programme co-ordinator described the 'supportive' role of the 'school secretary' who assists in having information about the students and exam details for their FETAC certification.

> *"I know the 'school secretary' does an awful lot of extra work like*
> *accounts and doing the minutes of Board Of Management Meetings*
> *also. So I think their job is very vital."   (O4)*

Q2   Do you feel they have an impact in the education system?

This teacher referred to their '*knowledge*' role and felt they had an impact in the education system because he/she felt they would be very '*cognitive*' of what was going on and all the new ideas of what was coming up and made reference to the importance of their work with the principal (Casanova, 1991) and Trachman (1993). The interviewee made reference to the impact of the 'school secretary' in terms of the interesting e.mails he/she would send regarding new ideas and events that were happening in their subject or department area. The interviewee referred to the very good computer skills

of the 'school secretary' and how they were very good at '*picking up*' on things (Fearfull, 2005). This would concur with Jarrett (2008) who describes how employers need to be '*cognizant*' of the 'soft' data coming from their employees.

> *"I would feel that you would have an impact because you would send me on a lot of interesting things even the recent e.mails you got, because I would never hear about those things you see and I mean subject department heads don't often let us know what is happening and at least we are sent the information"*   *(O3)*

The second teacher described their *'interactive'* role and felt the 'school secretary' had an impact on the education system in this way. He/She described how this was mainly due to the large number of adult students in the school.

> *"I think they impact on the education system particularly with the adults giving them good information on courses, a good background on the courses we offer. They are the first point of contact that people meet by telephone, so they would have to create a good image for the school and I suppose that has an impact on people coming to the school and what they think and their relaxation and ease with settling into the school and the whole education system"*   *(O4)*

This teacher also referred to the role the school secretary played with new teachers starting in the school and the knowledge they would provide to them.

> *"I know that when teachers come in first I know how they would have an awful lot of information and details even more than new teachers coming in about the students and results and about the education "*   *(03)*

This would concur with the views of teachers interviewed in a group who commented on how the 'school secretary' settled students into the college

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and how they noticed this particularly for '*first years*' who liked to go to the 'school office'

Q3.   How does the school secretary assist you in your role?

This teacher described how the 'school secretary' has the '*forms*' and '*information*' on students and that assists in the detail they would have. He/she described it as a '*knowledgeable*' role *(03)*. This would concur with the findings from one 'school secretary' interviewed in New York who described how they had '*information*' on every single person in the school.

This teacher referred to the '*supportive*' and '*helpful*' role of the 'school secretary in terms of how teachers can enter the school office at any time

> "*I mean the office is such a great open office you can always just run in and get something and that is just unbelievably helpful because we simply don't have time to be arguing with the 'secretary' that we need three pens. I mean when you go into the office you will get the answer that you want or the stocks that you need. It is brilliant*".   *(O3)*

Attwood (2008) refers to how we often only think of education administration as something that happens in the classroom but describes how education administration in the '*school office*' assists in the 'smooth' running of the school.

This teacher described how one of their roles was also IT co-ordinator and how a lot of their work would be sourcing software and how the 'school secretary' will always have the forms available from our Head Office, or '*contract*' forms available very quickly to "lay your hands on it" for anything they were looking for. He/she described how their first port of call was the 'school office' who knew where to get x, y and z. The teacher also referred to their programme co-ordinator role and how the 'school secretary'

helped with the 'certification' process for them and taking messages from 'extern examiners'.

> *"But for teachers as well there is also forms for reports and that kind of thing as well. So there is a huge amount of work that we depend on the school administrator for".* *(O4)*

The above would concur with the views of the senior official interviewed from IMPACT who referred to how the VEC's had branched out into all different kinds of areas and referred to them as the 'bolt' on areas.

Q4. How do you feel the 'school secretary' meets the needs of the students, parents or other stakeholders that they interact with?

The teacher described how he/she would be '*in and out*' of the office wanting to make '*phone calls*' to parents and described how the 'school office' was a very '*safe place*' if the teacher needed something. He/she also referred to the 'confidential' nature of the school office and how important this was for students and their parents. Casanova, (1991), Trachman (1993) and Persaud (2005) all made reference to the very important 'confidential' nature of the role of the 'school secretary' and those involved in '*frontline*' services.

> *"everything is very confidential and they know that and sometimes you would have information on students that nobody else would have and they are conscious of that I suppose. You know it tends to be very confidential. That is a big thing really for students". (03)*

The teacher made reference to the tremendous assistance provided by the 'school secretary' to '*international students*'.

> *"non-national students get tremendous assistance from the 'school secretary' and it takes a lot of time doesn't it? A different culture yes and that is very comfortable and that is*

> *often their first port of call in the school and once they get a*
> *very positive response that they are dealt with positively*
> *with yourselves and then they see the school as a positive place*
> *that they are not just thrown an application form at them and*
> *you say go off and fill that in. You would be conscious that they*
> *might need help and getting all that asylum seekers information*
> *which can be difficult for them and the grants systems you would*
> *be doing a lot of work on the grants wouldn't you".*   *(03)*

The above would concur with the views of one principal interviewed and Persaud (2005) who referred to the very important '*frontline*' position of the 'school secretary' that could be a '*barrier*' to the student enrolling in the college. School secretaries and maintenance staff interviewed made reference to the need for training in this area so that each could gain an understanding of each other's '*culture*'.

Q5   Do you describe them as 'school secretary?

The teacher described how they use the title 'school secretary' but commented on how they did not see the 'school secretaries' as 'secretaries' but part of the school team.

> *"somehow I don't like it. It seems to be kind of removed or*
> *something I don't know what else you could be. Secretary sounds*
> *like somebody who just types up letters and looks after the books and*
> *I mean you do so much more than that".*   *(O3)*

This teacher described how in the past they would have referred to 'school administrators' as 'school secretaries' but is aware that this is not their grade and would now refer to them as 'school administrators' because '*there is an awful lot more than secretarial work"* and referred to

> *"From petty cash, to accounts, to ordering, I mean that is*
> *strictly not secretarial work. I think the whole idea of*
> *'administrators' would be more suitable".*   *(04)*

The above would concur with the findings of the Rochford (2002) review and the accounts described by 'school secretaries' and principals interviewed.

Q6   Do you see the role as one that requires specialist knowledge to provide information to students and all of the other stakeholders they interact with?

The teacher felt that the 'school secretary' did require specialist knowledge for the role.

> *"Well certainly it is specialist knowledge to assist us absolutely and giving information to people and the whole confidentiality thing is hugely important there and as a tutor anything I ever tell the 'school secretary' doesn't go any further. I think the role the 'school secretary' has so many hats on her because you are information givers. You are liaising with us, you are liasing with students, you are liaising with parents, you know it is very multi-tasking isn't it really".* *(O3)*

Trachman (2003) referred to the many different hats 'school secretaries' wear. School secretaries and principals interviewed made reference to the 'multi-facet' nature of the role. Spielberg (2009) in her article ' *UFT honours 'school secretaries' at annual luncheon*' refers to 'school secretaries' as the 'masters of multi-tasking'.

This teacher referred to the computer and IT knowledge required to carry out the role and how definitely you would require some specialist knowledge. He/she also referred to the financial skills and all the money that is taken in September with the enrolment and commented

> *"so all of those who came out with just secretarial qualifications would be hard-pressed now to be up and running like that. Obviously it comes with experience"* *(04)*

The above would concur with the views of the senior official from IMPACT

who described how he/she has phone calls everyday form 'school secretaries' reporting that they are unable to keep up with the new computer software systems introduced and the systems in place that are unable to cope with them. It would also concur with the views of the senior academic person from CDVEC who described how most 'school secretaries' came in with a basic secretarial course and how things had moved on and that the level that was missing was Level 6. It would also concur with the findings form the report of the EFGSU (2007) who describe if there is no change in policy on training that there will be a shortage of skill sets from levels 6-8 on the National Qualifications Framework.

Q7   What would you like to see in the role for the future?

The teacher referred to how he/she liked the whole idea of information giving particularly on the computer and the open door policy and how it was to teachers in their role.

> "*I must say that is something that is new and I wouldn't have thought about that before. I would like to see that the role would remain the same, that there wouldn't be any changes in it, that it stays that sort of open door policy. I think that is very nice you know. It is very nice for us anyway as teachers that we can always go in*".   (O3)

This would not concur with the views of the senior academic member of CDVEC who felt the need for '*boundaries*' to be put on the role of the 'school secretary' where he/she did not feel that they had to be '*everything to everyone*' and described that if all the needs of all stakeholders were added up that what you would end up with was a very *bewildered* 'school secretary' massively *busy* but massively '*ineffective'* as well. He/she stated that this was why the 'school office' had to be closed at times to allow the 'school secretary' catch up with work.

Another teacher described how they would like to see another 'school administrator' employed and commented

> *"Well I suppose another 'school administrator'. I know we have two 'administrators' here, but I know the amount of work that both do they could probably definitely do with an assistant – an actual 'school secretary' you know what I mean, because I now the variety of things that they do from ordering, the HR reports, and the Returns and all that sort of thing. I think they could do with another person to do the basic 'secretarial' stuff. I think that is something that would probably be useful".* *(04)*

Q8. How important do you think Communication, Collaboration, Networking and Professional Development is for 'school secretaries'?

The teacher asked the researcher if she had any professional development and the researcher informed her that a couple of years ago before the 'school development plan' was implemented professional development was arranged for 'school secretaries'. The researcher informed the teacher that because the 'school secretaries' in her school were so busy they did not attend. This would not concur with the views of one principal interviewed when the researcher made this comment who described how everybody is busy but that it is all relative and how the staff in his/her college undertook the professional development and how he/she attended the awards ceremony for their presentation. The teacher stated

> *"That is not good no because obviously you should be there because a lot of what is going on is relevant to you and new things that are coming on stream. Because I mean we are asked to look into things and come back and report on things so like why can't you be asked to do that. You could partake of that because you are all part of the same".* *(03)*

This would not concur with the motto of UFT " *we are all in it together*" where 'school secretaries' are members of the United Federation of Teachers Union.

The researcher described how the findings from the 'pilot study' had indicated the need for better communication and collaboration and the need to be kept in the loop of what was happening. She described how in some schools 'school secretaries' attend staff meetings and in others they do not. The teacher described how a lot of the *'stuff'* they talk about is just day- to-day school 'stuff'. This teacher explained the changes that had taken place over the ten years he/she had been in the college in terms of the number of different roles taken on and how that has brought about more *'interaction'* with the 'school secretaries'

> *"so from my point of view they were probably a 'smaller' part of my life first and now I don't think a day goes by that I don't see them at least five times a day to answer questions or ring them for what ever. So the role I would say has probably gone a lot more demanding. School Development Planning and School Policies, so you are a lot more involved in all that as well. You see it is all about the 'whole school planning' so everybody has to be involved. The whole idea of the stakeholders, parents, teachers, the whole staff and administrators we all have a stake now in what is going on. The role has changed hugely, yes".* (O4)

McNamara and O'Hara (2008, p. 50) described how traditionally, schools in the Irish education system and the teachers within them have not tended to engage in '*collaborative*' planning or '*evaluation*' processes. They refer to the influence of the whole school evaluation (WSE) process and the trend towards '*openness*' and '*accountability*' in all public institutions and the increasing acceptance among educationalists that the '*whole school planning*' and '*evaluation*' are purposeful means of promoting '*school effectiveness*' and developments.

Q9.   How has the role changed over the last decade?

The teacher commented on how the role of the 'school secretary' was very much more 'open' now from what he/she would remember from her own experience of school in the past where the 'school secretary' was behind a

closed door in the past.

> *"I think it is the whole openness of it. We share our information with you, you share our information with us and I would see that as the main difference you know. Much more collaborative with all the staff for the benefit of everybody for yourselves and ourselves and that would be the main thing I would see"*   *(O3)*

This description of the change of the role would concur with one of the group of teachers interviewed who described how this was the case in where he/she was teaching in a school abroad that teachers would not have the same open contact with 'school secretaries'. It would also concur with the views of one 'school secretary' who described how her predecessor was never allowed develop under the old regime.

10.   **Is there anything else you would like to add as a participant in the research?**

The teacher referred to how absolutely brilliant he/she felt having somebody there all the time with such "*knowledge*" and commented *"I think it is brilliant, so helpful to me personally and as I said I like the whole kind of team effort and even the management they treat everybody as a team and there doesn't seem to be too many layers you know, we all work together very well ".* This would concur with the collaborative leadership model of Slater (2008) and the distributed model of Morgan and Sugrue (2008). It would also concur with the recommendations of Jarrett (2008) of the need for organisations to move to a more '*fluid*' structure or the 'organic' metaphor used to describe flatter organisational structures.

This teacher also referred to how happy the students were with the '*school office*' and where one student undertaking a course in the current academic session stated that the first place they were in was the 'school office' and described how helpful the 'school secretaries' were and how they knew they

would be happy straight away. *"So it is massively, massively important to have that optimistic outlook for all of us". (O3)* The above would once again concur with the views of Persaud (2005).

This teacher commented on how he/she found the 'school secretaries' in the school very helpful and how they had always helped with everything he/she ever needed.

> *"Even if they can't come up with something they will*
> *do their utmost to get it"* (O4)

The above would concur with one of the 'school secretaries' interviewed at school (n) who commented on how they do their 'utmost' to provide all stakeholders with what they want and need.