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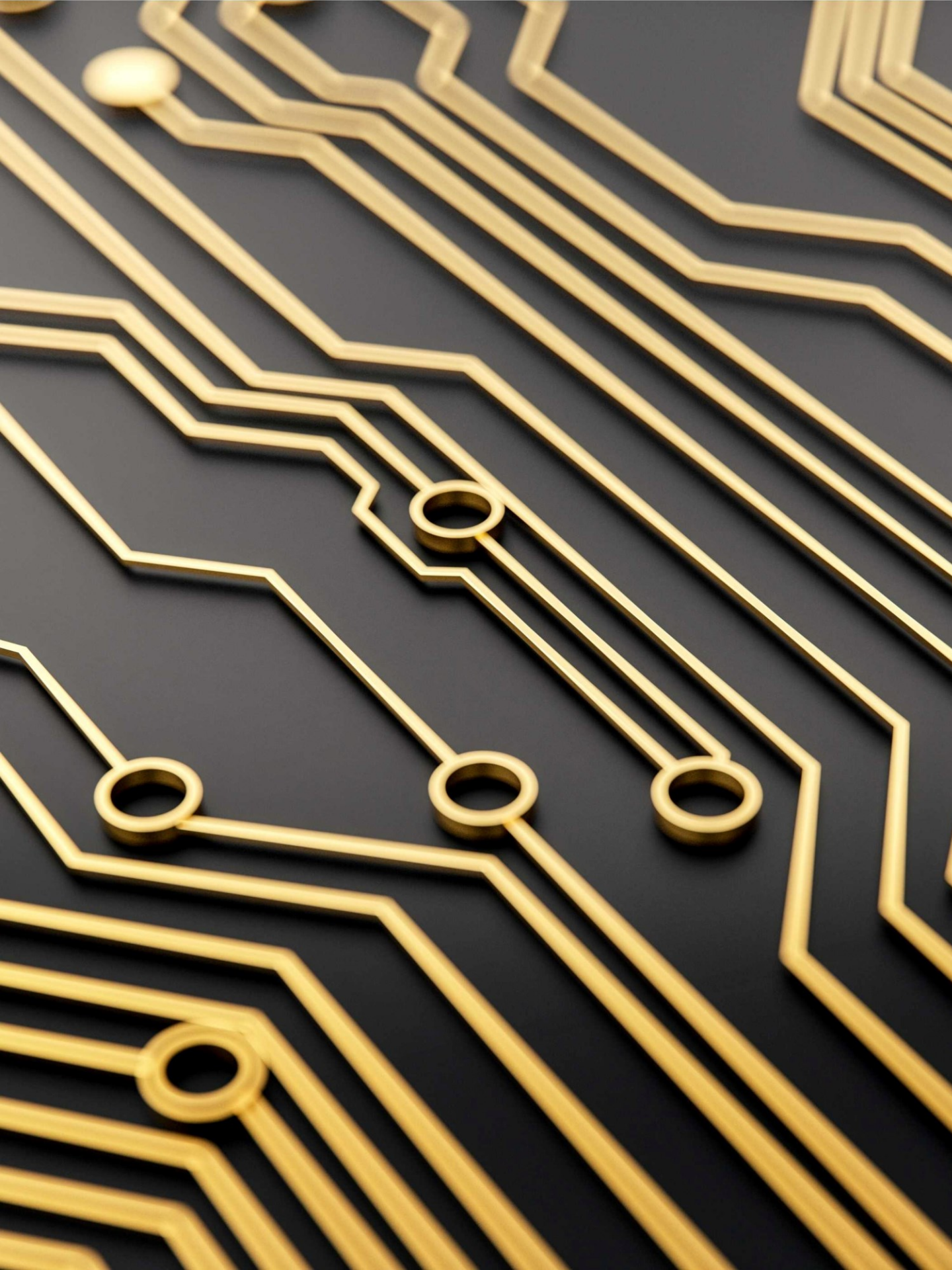

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EXPLORING EDTECH #11
March 2025

Editorial

Welcome to **Exploring EdTech #11**.

As we release the 11th issue of Exploring EdTech, it's clear that educational technology in Ireland has reached an important inflection point. The innovations featured in this edition showcase how technology is no longer merely a tool for teaching digital skills but actively transforming how we understand learning, skill development, and student wellbeing.

This issue highlights several groundbreaking Irish initiatives: from the development of evidence-based quality standards for EdTech products, to platforms like *Skilly* that measures and tracks wellbeing skills through self-assessed reflective practices, to *TY Future*'s immersive career simulations, and *CalmoKids'* innovative approach to children's mental wellbeing. Each represents a different facet of how technology can address critical educational challenges.

What unites these diverse innovations is their focus on holistic student development. Today's educational technology isn't just about academic achievement—it's about nurturing resilience, supporting mental health, building essential life skills, and preparing students for careers that may not yet exist.

For educators and school leaders navigating this rapidly evolving landscape, thoughtful implementation remains crucial. The EdTech Quality Standards framework discussed in our lead article provides valuable guidance for selecting tools with proven impact.

Visit our website to subscribe to our News service, which will keep you updated throughout the year on all things EdTech. Together, we can ensure that technology serves our core educational mission while preparing students for the complex world they'll inherit. Please feel free to contact me with any ideas and suggestions for future issues.

Tim Lavery, Editor-in-Chief, March 2025

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EdTech Quality Standards

Choosing Validated EdTech for Better Learning Outcomes

Tim Lavery

EdTech Quality Standards

Choosing Validated EdTech for Better Learning Outcomes

Tim Lavery

As digital tools become increasingly embedded in our classrooms, the transformative potential of educational technology has never been more evident. From adaptive learning platforms to sophisticated AI-driven systems, EdTech promises to enhance student engagement, facilitate personalised learning, and support educators in their daily practice. Yet, as Ireland's primary and secondary schools navigate an increasingly crowded marketplace of technological solutions, a fundamental question emerges: how can we determine which tools genuinely improve educational outcomes?

The Evidence Gap in Educational Technology

The appeal of innovative EdTech solutions is undeniable. School leaders and teachers are naturally drawn to products promising enhanced efficiency, individualised instruction, or improved assessment results. However, a concerning reality persists, many of these tools lack empirical validation to substantiate their claims.

A 2022 report by Digital Promise revealed that only a limited proportion of EdTech products undergo rigorous evaluation to assess their effectiveness. This lack of oversight creates significant challenges for educational decision-makers who must distinguish between truly impactful tools and those that are merely well-marketed.

This evidence gap carries serious implications for the Irish education system. Schools risk allocating precious financial resources to ineffective tools, educators may invest valuable instructional time integrating unproven products, and most critically, students may miss important opportunities for academic growth and development.

Dr. Karen Cator, former CEO of Digital Promise, highlights this challenge: "Teachers and school leaders are under immense pressure to improve student outcomes, yet they often lack the time or expertise to thoroughly evaluate the efficacy of EdTech products. This is why third-party certifications and research-backed validation are essential."

Understanding the Value of Verification

For Irish schools operating within tight budgetary constraints, evidence-based verification offers crucial protection against wasteful investments. Each euro spent on unverified technology represents resources diverted from potentially more effective educational interventions.

The benefits of evidence-based approaches extend far beyond fiscal responsibility. For primary and secondary educators, empirically validated tools can streamline instructional processes, minimise implementation frustration, and provide actionable insights into student progress. This is particularly valuable in the context of Ireland's evolving curriculum frameworks and assessment practices.

A survey conducted by TeacherTapp indicates that 87% of teachers now specifically request evidence for any EdTech they introduce in their classrooms. This growing demand reflects increasing awareness that technological adoption should be guided by proven impact rather than marketing claims.

For students, the ultimate beneficiaries of educational technology, the stakes are particularly high. Research indicates that poorly designed EdTech can actually exacerbate educational disparities, disproportionately disadvantaging students who require additional support. A study by Rogers (2021) found that technological interventions without proper evidence-based design can widen achievement gaps rather than close them.

Conversely, empirically validated tools can help mitigate these inequalities by delivering personalised learning experiences tailored to diverse student needs. This is especially relevant for Irish classrooms with increasing diversity and varying learning requirements.

THE BUSINESS CASE FOR EVIDENCE

INTERESTINGLY, EVIDENCE OF EFFECTIVENESS DOESN'T JUST BENEFIT EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS, IT CREATES MEASURABLE ADVANTAGES FOR EDTECH DEVELOPERS THEMSELVES. A REPORT CO-AUTHORED BY BRIGHTEYE VENTURES, A SIGNIFICANT PLAYER IN EDTECH INVESTMENTS, AND JACOBS FOUNDATION'S LIBBY HILLS FOUND COMPELLING FINANCIAL RETURNS ASSOCIATED WITH EVIDENCE-BASED PRODUCTS.

THEIR ANALYSIS REVEALED THAT K-12 EDTECH COMPANIES WITH EVIDENCE HAD SIGNIFICANTLY HIGHER RETURNS ON INVESTED CAPITAL. THE AVERAGE MULTIPLE ON INVESTED CAPITAL (MOIC) FOR COMPANIES WITH EVIDENCE WAS 50% HIGHER THAN FOR THOSE WITHOUT EVIDENCE IN ONE INVESTMENT FUND AND 70% HIGHER IN ANOTHER.

THIS DATA SUGGESTS A POWERFUL ALIGNMENT BETWEEN EDUCATIONAL IMPACT AND BUSINESS SUCCESS I.E. COMPANIES THAT INVEST IN RIGOROUS EVALUATION MAY ACHIEVE BOTH BETTER OUTCOMES FOR STUDENTS AND STRONGER FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE. FOR IRISH EDTECH STARTUPS AND ESTABLISHED COMPANIES ALIKE, THIS UNDERSCORES THE VALUE OF PRIORITISING EVIDENCE-BASED DESIGN AND EVALUATION FROM THE OUTSET.

Understanding Certification Frameworks

To address the evidence gap, several international certification frameworks have emerged that are relevant to the Irish educational context. These frameworks provide standardised approaches to evaluating the effectiveness and quality of EdTech products.

Major Certification Bodies

Several organisations have developed comprehensive certification processes to evaluate educational technology:

Digital Promise offers the Research-Based Design Product Certification, which recognises EdTech products that incorporate research on how students learn into their design and development. This certification focuses on the extent to which products are grounded in established learning sciences.

1EdTech (formerly IMS Global) provides certifications that focus primarily on technical standards and interoperability, ensuring that EdTech products can integrate seamlessly with existing school systems and platforms.

ISTE (International Society for Technology in Education) has developed the ISTE Seal of Alignment, which evaluates how well digital resources align with the ISTE Standards for students, educators, and educational leaders.

EdTech Impact (UK) offers evidence verification through a combination of research review and user-generated ratings from educators who have implemented the technology in classroom settings.

ICEIE (EduEvidence) is a global not-for-profit organisation committed to transforming digital education by evaluating and certifying edtech tools for learners. The EdTech Ireland Innovation Network has partnered with ICEIE to deliver Ireland's first EdTech Quality Mark certification based on their global framework.

The ICEIE Framework

The International Certification of Evidence of Impact in EdTech (ICEIE) represents a significant advancement in EdTech evaluation. This framework consolidates different certification approaches into a standardised international evidence framework based on rigorous research criteria.

The ICEIE evaluates EdTech products across five critical dimensions:

1. **Efficacy**: How well does the product achieve its intended educational outcomes under optimal conditions?
2. **Effectiveness**: How well does the product perform in real-world educational settings?
3. **Ethics**: Does the product adhere to ethical standards regarding data usage, privacy, and responsible design?
4. **Equity**: Does the product provide equitable benefits across different student populations and contexts?
5. **Environment**: What is the product's sustainability impact, both in terms of environmental footprint and long-term viability?

Products that meet **ICEIE** standards receive certification that signals to educators and administrators that the technology has undergone independent evaluation and demonstrated measurable impact. This certification is increasingly recognised by educational systems worldwide, including in European contexts relevant to Irish education.

The ISTE EdTech Index

The ISTE EdTech Index represents an important resource for educators seeking validated technology solutions. This searchable database compiles information on certified EdTech products, allowing school leaders to compare options based on evidence of effectiveness, intended educational outcomes, and alignment with curriculum standards.

Data from the **ICEIE** and other certification bodies feed into this index, creating a comprehensive resource for informed decision-making. For Irish schools, this tool can help identify technologies that have demonstrated effectiveness in comparable educational systems.

Practical Implementation Guide for Irish Schools

As primary and secondary schools in Ireland consider EdTech investments, the following practical steps can help ensure evidence-informed decisions:

1. Establish an Evidence-Based Selection Process
Develop a structured approach to EdTech evaluation that prioritises evidence of effectiveness. This might include:

- ✓ Creating a technology committee that includes teachers, IT staff, and school leaders
- ✓ Defining clear criteria for evidence quality (e.g., peer-reviewed research, independent evaluation)
- ✓ Establishing a standardised review protocol for all potential EdTech purchases

2. Conduct Pre-Implementation Assessment
Before adopting any EdTech solution, assess its alignment with specific educational needs:

- ✓ Identify the specific learning challenges or opportunities the technology aims to address
- ✓ Review research literature related to those specific challenges
- ✓ Evaluate how well the proposed technology's evidence matches your school's particular context and student population

3. Request Specific Evidence Documentation
When engaging with EdTech providers, request concrete evidence of effectiveness:

- ✓ Ask about certification status from recognised bodies like ICEIE
- ✓ Ask for peer-reviewed research studies that evaluate the product
- ✓ Request case studies from similar school contexts (particularly other Irish schools)
- ✓ Ask specifically about evidence related to outcomes for diverse learner populations

6 STEP

EDTECH PURCHASING GUIDE FOR IRISH SCHOOLS

EDTECH IRELAND INNOVATION NETWORK

1. Establish Evidence-Based Selection Process

Develop a structured approach to EdTech evaluation that prioritises evidence of effectiveness.

2. Conduct Pre-Implementation Assessment

Before adopting any EdTech solution, assess its alignment with specific educational needs.

3. Request Specific Evidence Documentation

When engaging with EdTech providers, request concrete evidence of effectiveness

4. Pilot Implementation with Evaluation

Consider implementing promising technologies on a limited basis with built-in evaluation.

5. Participate in Collaborative Evidence-Building

Join networks of schools sharing EdTech implementation experiences.

6. Regularly Review Evidence of Impact

Establish processes for ongoing evaluation of implemented technologies.

Be willing to discontinue technologies that don't demonstrate positive impact.

EDTECH IRELAND INNOVATION HUB

4. Pilot Implementation with Evaluation
Consider implementing promising technologies on a limited basis with built-in evaluation:

- ✓ Select a small group of classrooms or subjects for initial implementation
- ✓ Establish clear metrics for success based on desired learning outcomes
- ✓ Collect both quantitative data (e.g., assessment results) and qualitative feedback (from teachers and students)
- ✓ Compare results against established baselines before expanding implementation

5. Participate in Collaborative Evidence-Building
Join networks of schools sharing EdTech implementation experiences:

- ✓ Engage with teacher networks evaluating similar technologies
- ✓ Share implementation experiences with other schools
- ✓ Participate in research partnerships with universities or educational research organisations
- ✓ Contribute to growing evidence base through structured documentation of outcomes

6. Regularly Review Evidence of Impact
Establish processes for ongoing evaluation of implemented technologies:

- ✓ Schedule regular reviews of EdTech effectiveness using established metrics
- ✓ Be willing to discontinue technologies that don't demonstrate positive impact
- ✓ Update evaluation criteria as educational goals and contexts evolve
- ✓ Request updated evidence from providers as their products develop

The Economic and Educational Imperative

For schools throughout Ireland, investing in certified EdTech represents both sound financial management and an educational imperative. Every resource allocated to unverified tools represents a missed opportunity to support authentic student learning.

The Digital Promise report emphasises the importance of collaboration between EdTech developers, researchers, and teachers to ensure that products are both innovative and effective. The most successful EdTech solutions combine cutting-edge technology with rigorous research validation. In Ireland this is being spearheaded by the EdTech EdTech Ireland Innovation Hub with the development of an impact/quality standard EdTech database exclusively for use by schools, built on the ICEIE Global EdTech Evidence List.

This collaboration is particularly important in the Irish context, where educational technologies must align with the Digital Strategy for Schools to 2027 and Oide Technology in Education guidelines with specific curriculum frameworks of the Irish educational system. By insisting on evidence that specifically addresses these contextual factors, schools can ensure that their technological investments truly support their educational vision.

Moving Forward: A Research-Informed Approach

The EdTech industry holds tremendous potential to transform education, but this potential can only be fully realised through adherence to high standards of quality and effectiveness. By

prioritising research-backed design and external certification, educators and administrators can ensure they select tools that yield genuine educational benefits.

For primary and secondary schools in Ireland navigating this complex landscape, the direction is clear: insist on external validation (and certification where possible) when making EdTech investments. This approach safeguards limited resources while maximising opportunities for student growth and achievement.

With the global EdTech market projected to reach €385 billion by 2025, the importance of evidence-based selection will only continue to grow. By embracing this approach, Ireland's educational institutions can ensure they harness the transformative potential of technology while avoiding costly missteps.

As we move forward, the most successful schools will be those that view EdTech not as an end in itself, but as a means to enhance evidence-based pedagogical practices. By maintaining a commitment to validated educational technology, Irish educators can ensure that digital tools genuinely serve the fundamental goal of all educational endeavours: supporting student learning and development. For more information on EdTech Certification and the Irish EdTech database visit the Edtech Ireland Innovation Hub

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Skilly

The Wellbeing Tracking Platform Supporting Teachers & Students

Skilly.ie

The Wellbeing Tracking Platform Supporting Teachers & Students

Education is evolving. While high-quality teaching and learning remain essential, employers increasingly seek candidates with strong soft skills like communication, adaptability, teamwork, and resilience. These social and emotional learning (SEL) skills are critical for student success in the AI workplace and beyond. Increasingly, Soft skills are now being labelled as Power skills to reflect their increasing prominence.

A New Era in Education

In many schools, SEL is still delivered using traditional SPHE textbooks. Teachers often struggle to find engaging, up-to-date resources that help students meaningfully develop these essential life skills. This is where Skilly steps in.

How Skilly Supports Teachers

For teachers, Skilly provides ready-to-use, structured content that eliminates the time-consuming task of sourcing SEL resources. The platform is -

- ✓ Ready to use, Effective, meaningful – Skilly structures SPHE and Wellbeing lessons across both Junior and Senior Cycle, making it easy for teachers to follow and adapt.
- ✓ Supports less experienced teachers – With pre-designed learning sequences, even teachers new to topics like RSE (Relationships and Sexuality Education) can confidently engage students in meaningful discussions.

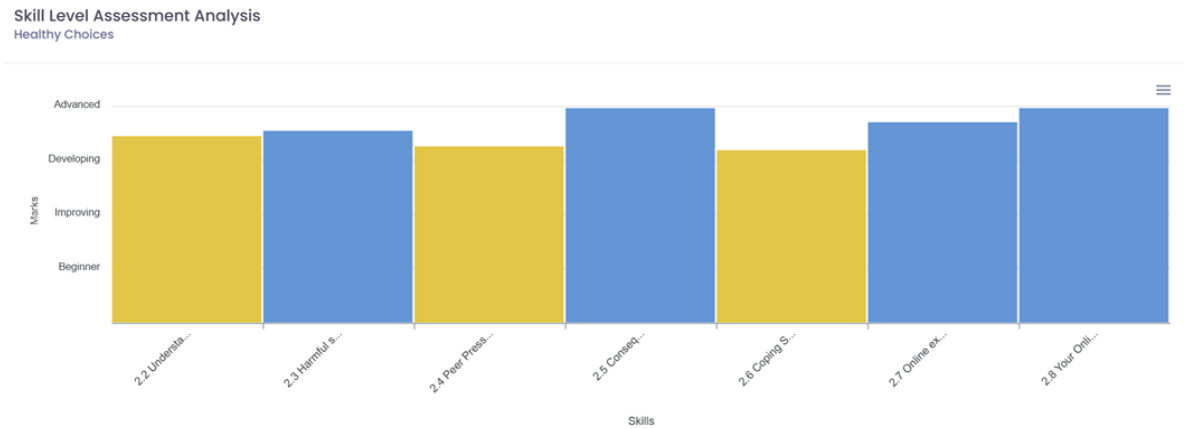


Image 1 -Students complete a pre-assessment of their skills so the teacher can target the gaps in making healthy choices

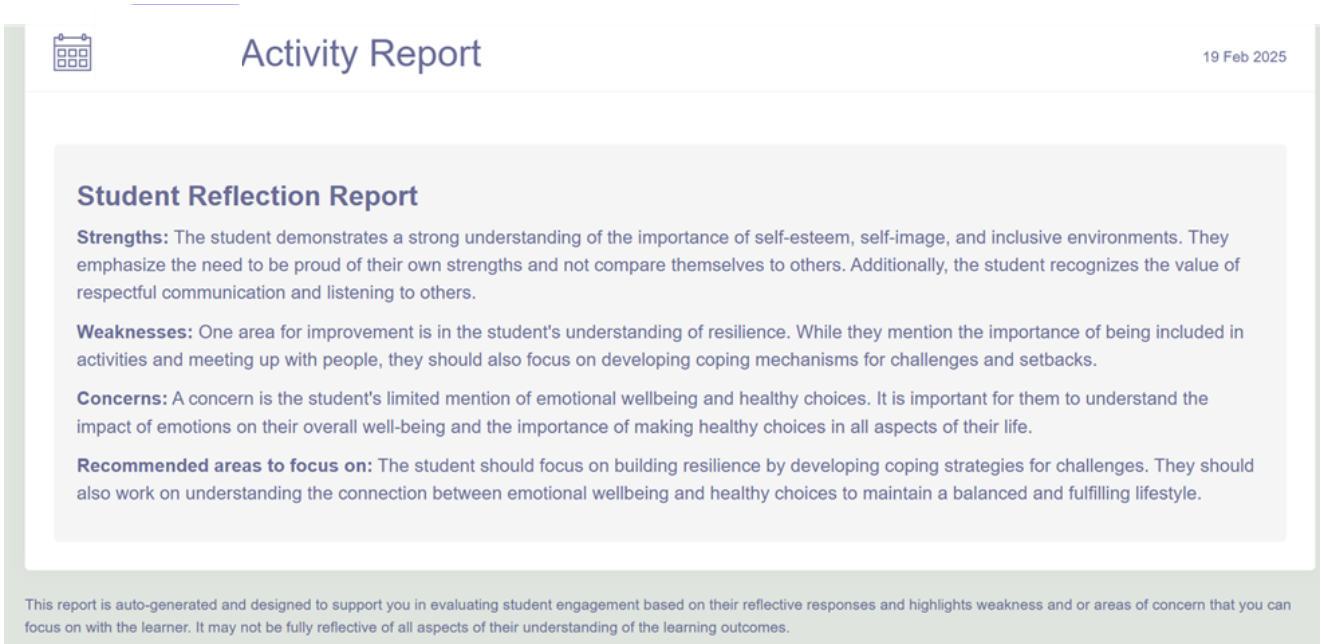
- ✓ Supports Class-Based Assessments (CBAs)—Skilly captures SEL reflections from the start of the first year through the Junior Cycle, ensuring all student self-reflection data is stored in one place. This allows teachers to track progress seamlessly and use the data in CBAs without additional preparation.

- ✓ Supports AEN (Additional Educational Needs) students – Skilly is already helping L1 and L2 students develop social and emotional skills in a structured and accessible way. The company also plans dedicated programmes tailored specifically for students with special educational needs and to support career guidance.

- ✓ Aligns with Cineáltas: Action Plan on Bullying. Skilly is a toolkit for embedding positive behaviours through self-reflective learning, helping schools implement Norma Foley's national anti-bullying strategy effectively.

- ✓ Saves time – AI features read and analyse students' reflective work, generating insights teachers can use for student feedback, parent interactions, and end-of-term reporting.

"As an SPHE teacher, I've used many well-being resources over the years, but this programme stands out. The change in the students is undeniable. Skilly's tools make self-reflection accessible, engaging, and impactful, and adding this platform resource to our school has truly been a game-changer."



How Students Benefit

Skilly creates an engaging learning experience for students by encouraging self-reflection and personal growth. It promotes positive, kind, and inclusive behaviors through interactive videos and real-world scenarios, helping students understand and navigate social situations. The Skilly Diary provides a digital space where students can reflect on their learning, fostering self-awareness. Additionally, AI-driven feedback encourages continuous improvement and personalised support for each student, offering formative feedback on each learning outcome.

Student Feedback

“It's not a book, and I love learning about this stuff, and it gives me a chance to share my views and get instant feedback.”

-

“I now know how to stand up to a bully and more about the topic.”

-

“Skilly helped me understand the impact of bullying, and I have seen good examples of bullying being stopped.”

A New Approach to Career Guidance

Traditional career guidance often involves assessments and searching through career portals, which many students find overwhelming and impersonal. Skilly offers a radically different approach: It uses AI to analyse students' soft skill strengths and recommend career pathways that align with their unique abilities.

Skilly's AI-driven career recommendations are a game-changer in career guidance. Instead of relying solely on academic results, Skilly identifies students’ natural competencies in communication, leadership, adaptability, and teamwork and suggests careers and courses that match their personal skill DNA.

Skilly offers a more engaging alternative by tracking students' self-reflection and skill development, which enables career guidance counsellors to provide personalised and insightful support. This future-ready solution aligns education with real-world employability trends, ensuring that students are better prepared for the workforce.

> “ This solution allows our students to match their soft or power skills to a future career pathway they will enjoy. AI can open up the potential to discover new relevant career pathways informed by who they are.”

A Practical Solution for Schools

Skilly is already significantly impacting schools across Ireland, from ETBs to private and ethos-based schools. Schools report that structured content simplifies lesson planning, while AI-driven student reflection tools provide valuable insights for teachers, students, and parents.

A key benefit of the Skilly approach is that the learning support or pastoral team can access the SEL data captured in the classroom to help them monitor students' progress, identify support needs, and provide targeted interventions. Beyond SPHE, Skilly has also consistently built soft skills in tutor time and wellbeing programmes, giving schools a flexible tool to build soft skills consistently across year groups.

Deployment of Skilly in the Classroom

Skilly is accessible on a browser and in Google or Microsoft Schools. For Microsoft schools, Skilly supports single sign-on via Teams. Data is stored in Azure Cloud in the EU, and the platform is entirely GDPR compliant, having been audited by several ETBs. The system has an API, and they have recently completed an integration with Schoolwise and Open AI.

Classroom Wi-Fi access is a pre-requisite, as well as access to devices, 1-1, trollies or computer rooms. Having students on devices in each SPHE class or Tutor Time is not essential. Skilly does not replace the leading role of the teacher to guide learning. Some teachers get the students to reflect in their self-reflective diary in each class, while others may do it every second or third week.

What is innovative about the Skilly approach to delivering the SPHE curriculum is that the platform creates a structured framework for the students to practice key skills through self-reflection over time and generates key data for the school to monitor the students' engagement and share with parents.

While introducing new technology takes time to implement and adapt existing practices, the feedback from many teachers and students is very positive, and they engage well. In one school that completed the Bullying Awareness module, the teachers observed a positive behaviour shift, with a greater sense of confidence and belonging. They felt the differentiated Skilly learning approach positively generated greater student empathy and kindness.

"St. Joseph's Secondary School has set a new benchmark in digital education with Skilly, an innovative platform that replaces traditional SPHE textbooks with AI-driven, real-world learning. Skilly empowers students to take charge of their personal growth, transforming classrooms and inspiring our students. It is now a foundational part of our School's wellbeing strategy and SSE plan, fostering a sense of community and belonging among our students and staff."

Peadar O'Tuathail, Principal, St Joseph's Secondary School, Mayo

From Innovation to Impact: The Story Behind Skilly

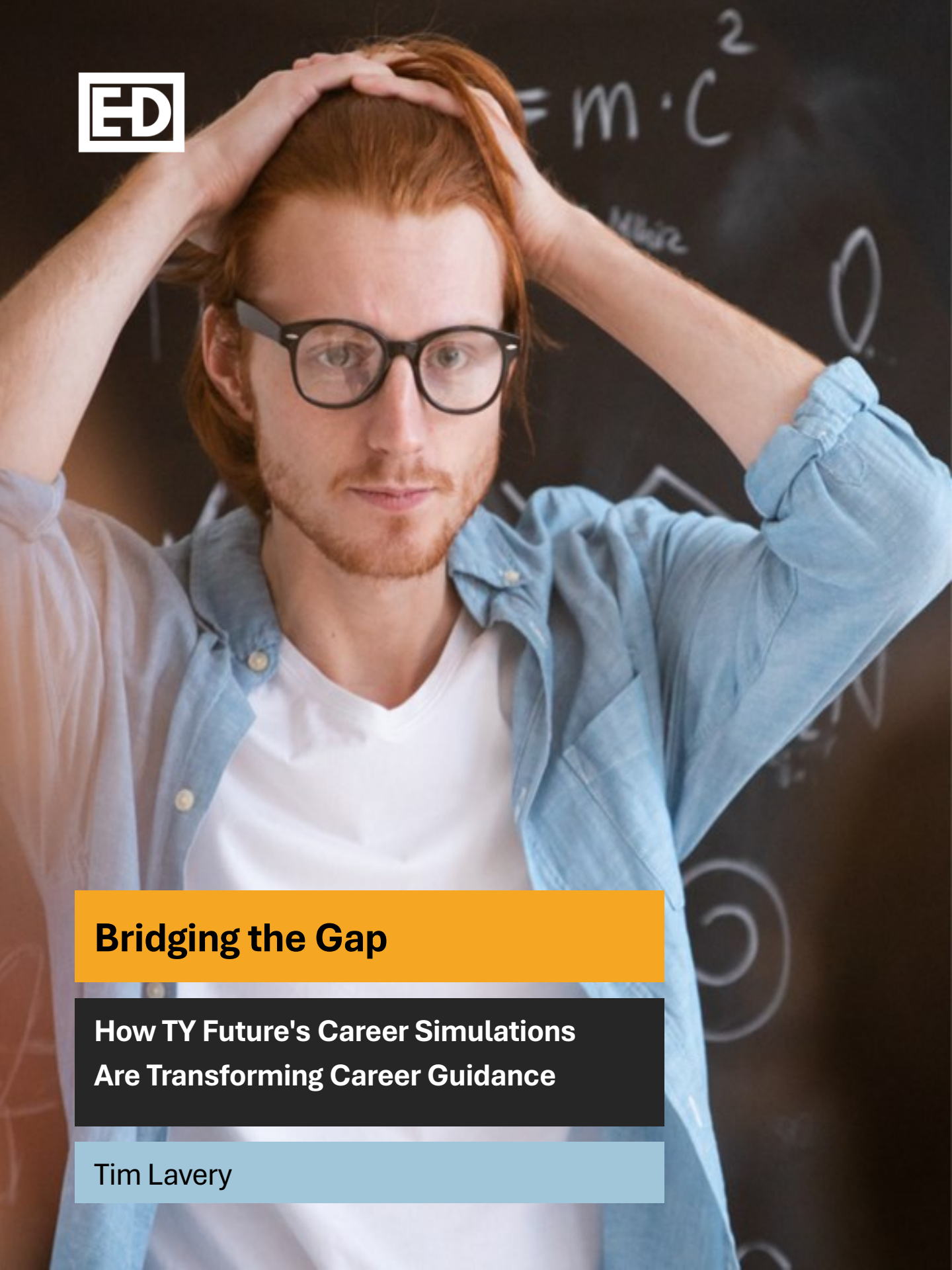
Skilly was founded during the pandemic by Shane Maguire and incubated in the Innovation Centre at University College Dublin. The platform was shaped by leading research in SEL, supported by Learnovate and a leading education advisory board.

Looking Ahead: The Future of SEL in Education

As AI continues to shape the education landscape, platforms like Skilly offer a more innovative, efficient way to equip students with the life skills they need to succeed. By supporting teachers and engaging students, Skilly ensures that social and emotional learning is not just an afterthought—but a core part of education.

For schools seeking to enrich their SPHE and Wellbeing programmes, Skilly presents a pragmatic, teacher-centric solution that bridges the gap between conventional teaching methods and the future of learning.

Since its inception, Skilly has been deployed across diverse schools, including leading ETB schools, private schools, and ethos-based schools such as Educate Together and CEIST schools. Its AI-powered, self-reflective learning approach transforms how students engage with social and emotional development. Learn more at https://skilly.ie/



Bridging the Gap

How TY Future's Career Simulations Are Transforming Career Guidance

Tim Lavery

BRIDGING THE GAP

How TY Future's Career Simulations Are Transforming Career Guidance

Tim Lavery

Ireland has launched its first-ever Digital Wellbeing Awards Programme, aimed at recognising and celebrating digital wellbeing in schools. This initiative is designed to equip students and teachers with the tools to navigate the digital world responsibly. The Programme, which is open to all primary and secondary schools in Ireland, underscores the country's commitment to fostering healthier digital habits.

Reimagining Career Preparation for Today's Students

In today's rapidly evolving educational landscape, schools face significant challenges when delivering comprehensive career guidance. With limited resources, increasing academic pressures, and a constantly changing work environment, educators often struggle to provide students with the practical insights they need to make informed career choices.

TY Future, an innovative Irish edtech platform, has developed a solution designed specifically to support schools in preparing students to thrive in the future workplace. Their approach? Immersive, real-world career simulations that transform how students explore potential career paths.

The Challenge: Why Traditional Career Guidance Falls Short

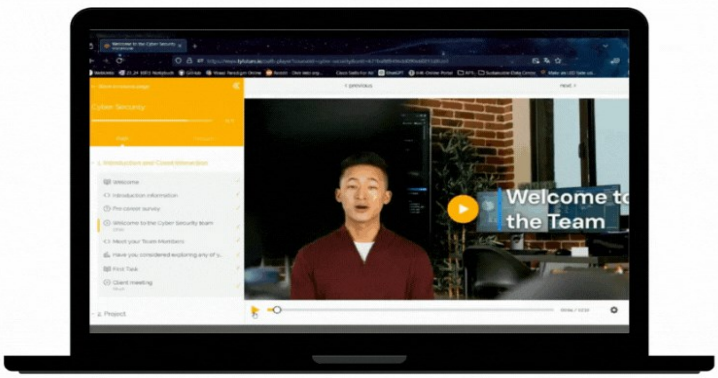
Before exploring the solution, it's important to understand the challenges schools face when delivering career guidance. Schools must balance academic, wellness, and wellbeing demands with the need for personalised career guidance, which has become increasingly difficult with limited time and resources. Additionally, keeping pace with the dynamic nature of modern careers and industry trends requires constant adaptation from educational institutions. Perhaps most challenging is ensuring students receive real-world exposure while managing curriculum requirements - a delicate balance that many educators struggle to maintain.

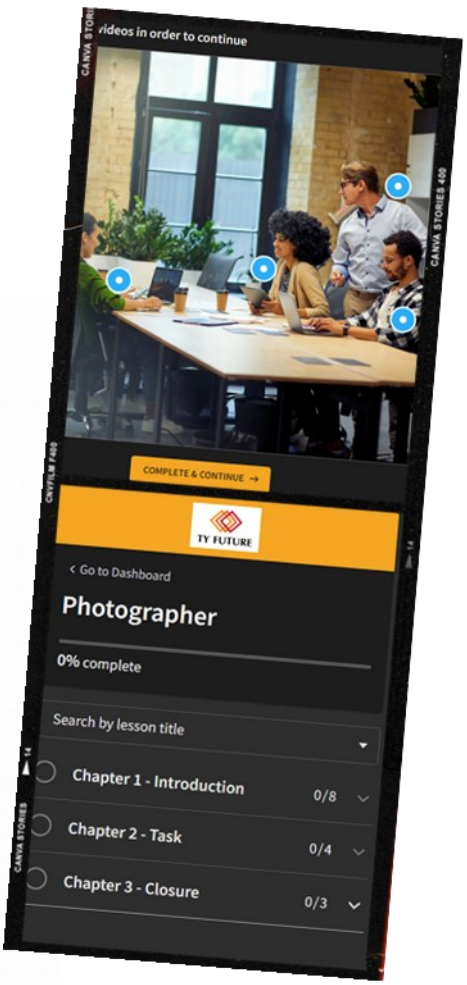
Introducing TY Future: An Innovative Approach

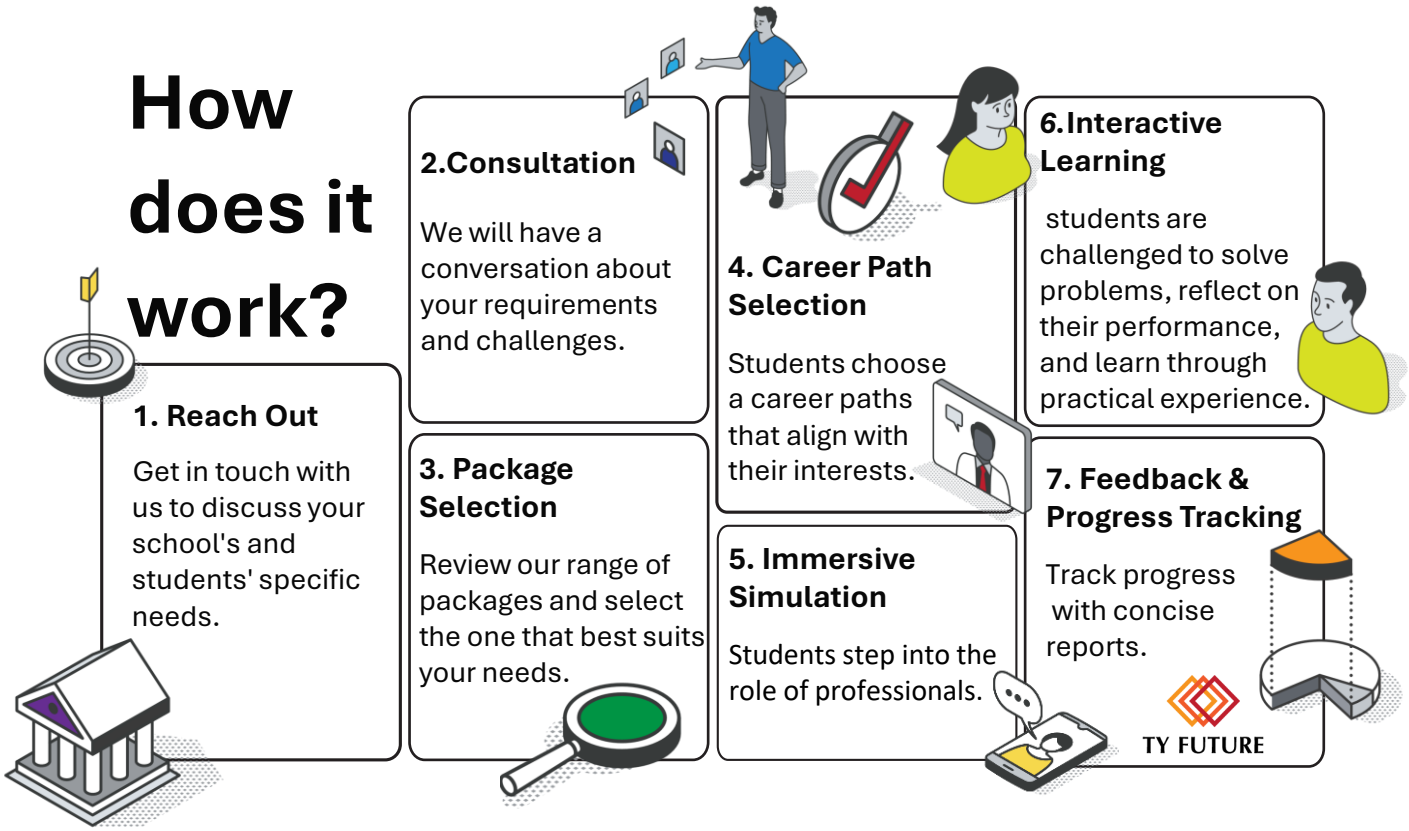
"*TY Future is an interactive, user-friendly platform that transforms the way students explore potential career paths*," explains Sylwia Brzozowska, CEO of TY Future. "*Our tool allows students to step into the role of professionals through simulated job environments, mirroring real-world tasks and onboarding processes*." The platform empowers students to discover diverse career paths while assisting Transition Year (TY) Coordinators and Guidance Counsellors in their efforts.

A Fresh Approach to Career Exploration

What makes TY Future different is its simulation-based methodology. The platform allows students to step into the role of professionals through simulated job environments that mirror real-world tasks and onboarding processes. This immersive experience not only boosts engagement but also helps students gain practical insights and skills into various careers—from







Key Benefits for Educators and Students

The platform uses interactive modules to keep students engaged while helping them build essential skills—described as "*much like training muscles through regular exercise*." This approach transforms passive career exploration into active skill development. Through realistic scenarios and practical tasks, students gain hands-on experience that bridges the gap between classroom learning and professional practice, giving them a genuine sense of different career paths.

One of the most practical advantages for educators is that TY Future's self-guided sessions are designed to fit into a typical 40-minute class period, complementing existing curriculum without disruption. The platform also includes data-driven reporting tools that enable educators to monitor student progress and tailor guidance to meet individual needs, creating a more targeted approach to career development.

The Student Journey

The TY Future experience follows a structured pathway designed to simulate real workplace experiences through three key phases: onboarding, tasks and assessments, and career development.

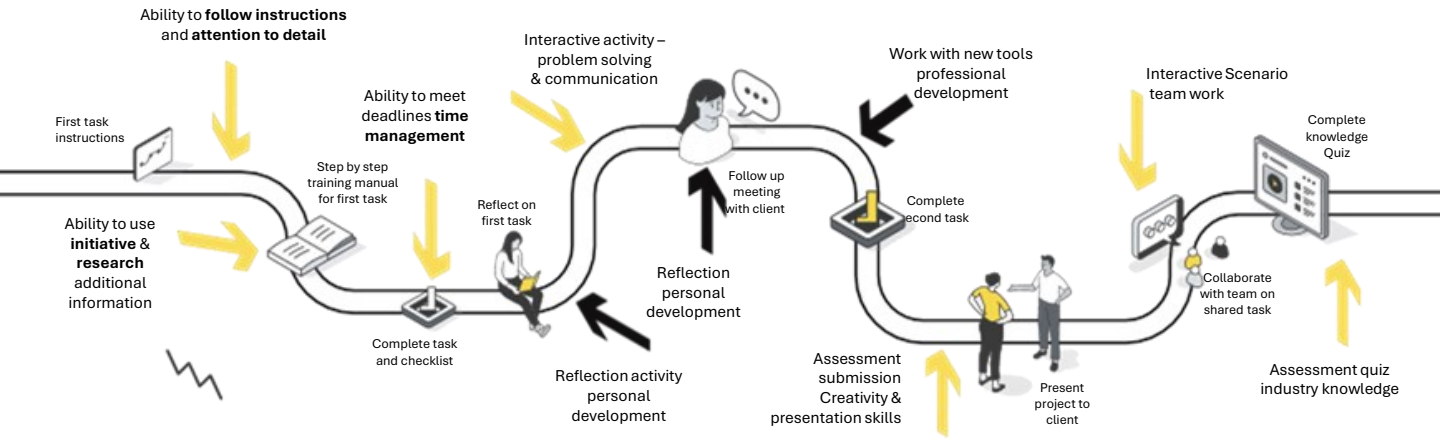
The onboarding process begins with a welcome letter and video from a supervisor, followed by pre-program assessments and career knowledge surveys. Students participate in interactive activities to learn about different roles, meet their virtual team, and gain initial familiarity with

specific career paths. This foundation-building phase mimics the orientation process in real workplaces.

As students progress, they engage in practical workplace tasks that develop critical professional skills. They learn to follow instructions with attention to detail, meet deadlines with effective time management, and use initiative to research additional information. The platform guides them through completing tasks with checklists, engaging in reflection activities for personal development, and participating in problem-solving and communication exercises. Students also work with professional tools, collaborate in teams, present projects to virtual clients, and complete knowledge assessment quizzes that measure their understanding and growth.

The experience concludes with comprehensive career development activities. Students learn about broader career prospects through video calls with supervisors and participate in development surveys that examine their goals, long-term plans, and potential commitment to various fields. Post-program measurements track changes in career knowledge and interest, helping both students and educators evaluate the impact of the experience.

Tasks and Assessments



TY FUTURE

Inclusive for All Learners

TY Future emphasises accessibility with tailored profiles for students with diverse needs. The platform accommodates learners with motor impairments, visual challenges, and cognitive needs, along with other specialised accessibility requirements. This inclusive approach ensures that career exploration is accessible to all students, regardless of their individual learning needs.

Real Impact: Student Testimonials

The platform's effectiveness is perhaps best demonstrated through student feedback. Grace from South Dublin shared: "The activities were engaging and interactive, allowing me to explore career paths in a hands-on way. The platform opened my eyes to careers I never considered before!" Similarly, Emma from South Dublin noted: "This program was super helpful! It gave me a supportive environment to explore what I liked and even find new skills I didn't know I had.“

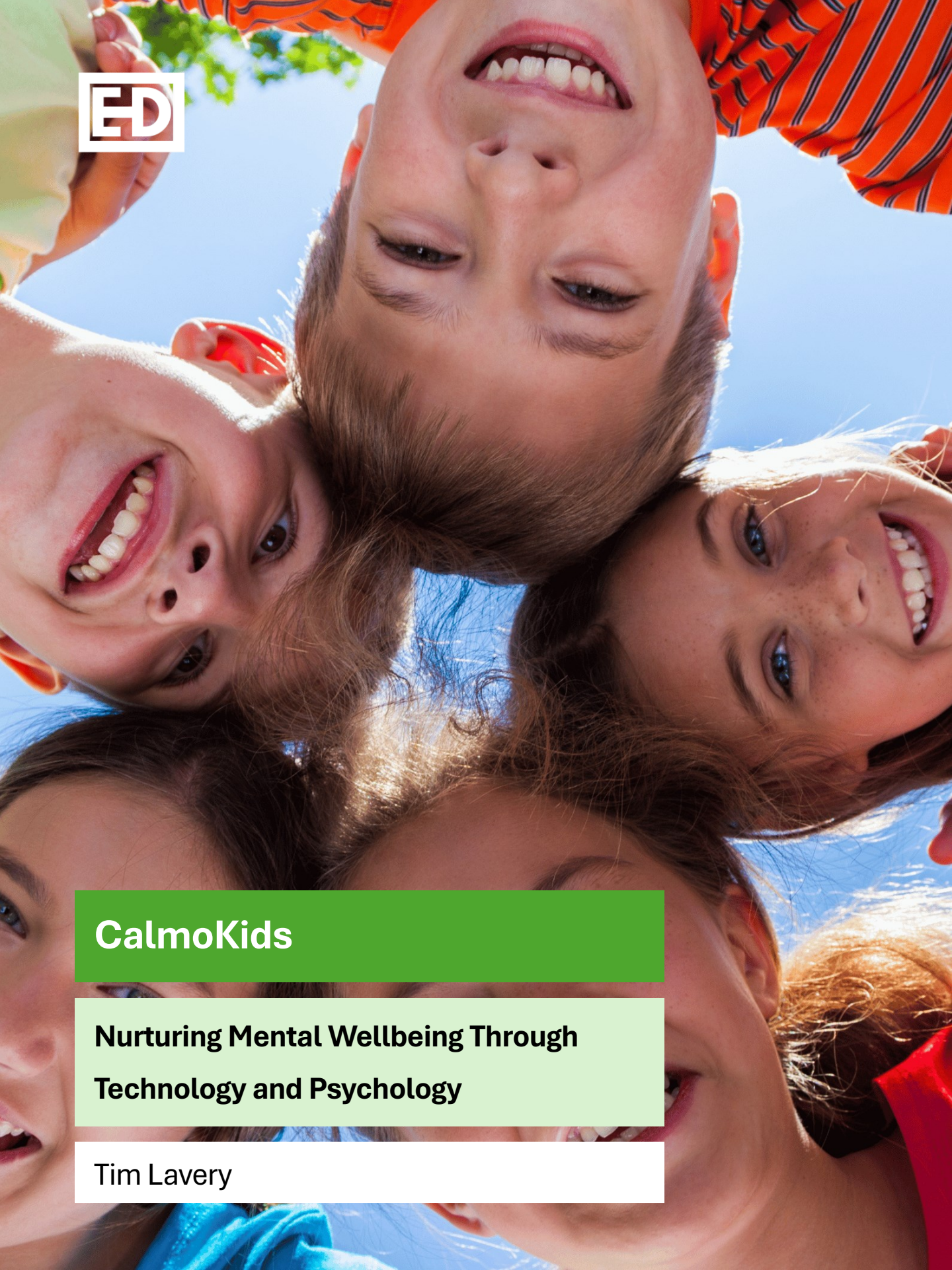
Implementation Process

Schools interested in implementing TY Future follow a straightforward process that begins with an initial contact to discuss specific school and student needs, followed by a consultation about requirements and challenges. Schools then review available packages to select the best fit for their particular situation. Once implemented, students choose career paths aligned with their interests and step into professional roles through immersive simulation. The learning experience involves solving problems, reflecting on performance, and gaining practical experience. Throughout the process, educators can track progress with concise reports, allowing for targeted interventions and guidance.

A Modern Solution for Modern Challenges

In an educational environment where career preparation has never been more important or more challenging, TY Future offers a practical, engaging approach that benefits both educators and students. By simulating real workplace experiences, the platform helps bridge the gap between classroom learning and professional practice, giving students valuable insights that can inform their educational and career choices.

For more information about TY Future and how they can support your school's career guidance efforts, visit
www.tyfuture.ie



CalmoKids

Nurturing Mental Wellbeing Through Technology and Psychology

Tim Lavery

CalmoKids

Nurturing Mental Wellbeing Through Technology and Psychology

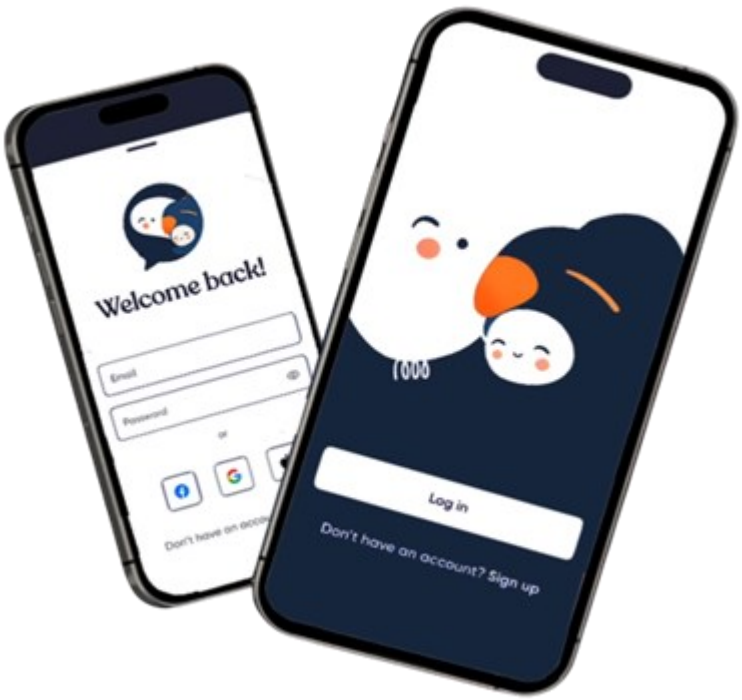
Tim Lavery

In the rapidly evolving landscape of educational technology, platforms that address children's emotional health stand at a critical frontier. CalmoKids emerges as a pioneering digital well-being platform specifically designed for children aged 5 to 12, merging technology with psychological principles to support emotional development through engaging, play-driven tools.

A Preventive Approach to Children's Mental Health

Unlike traditional mental health services that intervene after issues have escalated, CalmoKids embraces a preventive philosophy. The platform offers personalised experiences including emotion check-ins, guided breathing exercises, storified gamification, and playful real time feedback mechanisms. These elements help children build resilience, develop self-regulation skills, and gain deeper understanding of their emotional world during their foundational years.

The mobile app interface presents a friendly, child-appropriate design with engaging characters and intuitive navigation. The login screens feature welcoming messages and playful visual elements that immediately signal a safe digital environment for young users.



The statistics underscoring the need for such interventions are sobering. According to the World Health Organisation (2024), over 400 million children worldwide face mental health challenges, with a staggering 70% receiving no support. In Ireland specifically, 22% of Irish children show signs of emotional difficulty, significantly above the European average of 14–16%.

Access to traditional services remains alarmingly limited. Data from the CHO 9 region reveals children in areas like Balbriggan and North Inner City waited over 9 months for an initial appointment with CAMHS in 2023. Even more concerning, staffing levels in some areas reached just 36% of what was recommended.

The Team Behind CalmoKids

The platform is developed and led by a diverse team based in Dublin, founded by Rozi Mengulogul, whose work bridges psychology, innovation, artificial intelligence, and child-focused digital solutions. The developmental foundation was built by Baver Tas, an education expert specialising in special education, early intervention, and Floortime therapy. Together with designers, therapists, educators and ethical tech developers, the team constructed a system that reflects years of field experience.

In the past year, CalmoKids was selected for two of Ireland's most impactful entrepreneurship initiatives, New Frontiers by Enterprise Ireland, and the Furthr Foundry at Guinness Enterprise Centre. These programmes provided valuable mentorship and strategic growth opportunities, allowing the team to strengthen their foundation as both an educational tool and a social innovation.

But CalmoKids represents more than just a product, it embodies a movement toward inclusive emotional support, early intervention, and digital responsibility. As a purpose-led initiative aligned with the principles of AI for Good, the platform aims to make a meaningful difference in children's emotional development regardless of background.

The Growing Need for Mental Health Support in Children

The Dublin North City and County (CHO 9) Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Report 2022–2023 presents compelling data, highlighting the challenges in delivering children's mental health services. Chart 1 illustrates the top five reasons for referral to CAMHS, with query ADHD leading significantly, followed by anxiety and ED (Eating Disorders). The waiting lists data in Table 8 reveals stark disparities in service access, with some regions showing alarming numbers of children waiting over 9 months for initial appointments.

These delays create significant problems at critical developmental stages. As the report notes, many parents shared that by the time their children received attention, emotional difficulties had already deepened. Others hesitated to speak out, fearing their limited access to support might be withdrawn entirely.

Children aged 5-12 are often in what developmental psychologists refer to as the "*latency*" or "*quiet phase*" of emotional development, a stage where outward behaviours may appear calm and stable, yet internal emotional processing becomes increasingly sophisticated. This period is crucial as children form stronger peer relationships, build identity, and develop their first coping strategies. If emotional support is missing at this stage, difficulties can be internalised and remain unnoticed until adolescence or even adulthood, often emerging later in more complex ways.

Chart 1 *Top five combinations of reasons for referral to CAMHS*

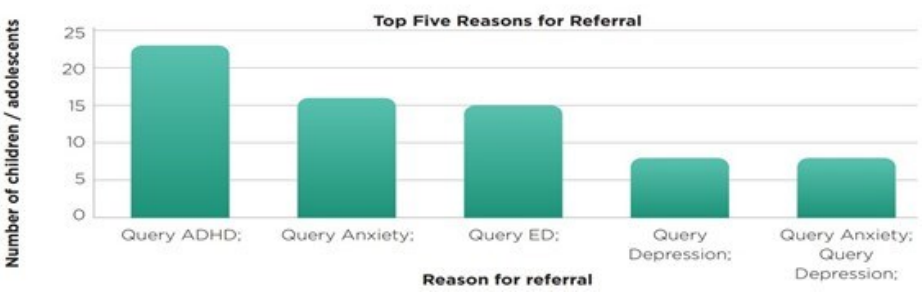


Table 8 *Waiting lists in excess of nine months*

	Waiting 9+ months initial appoint-ment Aug 22	Waiting 9+ months initial appoint-ment Dec 22	Waiting 9+ months initial appoint-ment Mar 23
Balbriggan	32	5	11
Ballymun / Finglas	5	5	3
Blanchardstown	0	0	0
Castleknock	4	0	0
Coolock/ Darndale	0	0	0
North East City	0	0	0
North Inner City	3	7	3
Swords	24	3	1

Numbers supplied by CHO.

Table 8 sourced from: https://www.mhcirl.ie/sites/default/files/2023-08/CHO 9 Report FINAL.pdf

Why an AI-Powered Solution is Crucial

Traditional models of human-led care, while invaluable, cannot meet the volume or pace of growing demand. Table 5 below, shows staffing disparities across CAMHS teams in the CHO 9 region, with levels varying dramatically from 36% of recommended national standards in North Inner City to 117% in Balbriggan.

CalmoKids integrates AI to complement, not replace, human relationships, using:

- ✓ Emotion and breath recognition to tailor real-time responses
- ✓ Gamified and story-based learning to keep children engaged
- ✓ Anonymised pattern-based reports for caregivers
- ✓ A privacy-first infrastructure that ensures safety and complies with GDPR-K and COPPA standards

Recent studies support the development team's approach. A 2025 systematic review by Fernández-Batanero et al. concluded that digital mental health tools, especially those with gamified elements and personalised feedback, can significantly support children's emotional wellbeing. Similarly, Kamarudin et al. (2022) showed that even short, AI-supported programmes can make a meaningful difference helping young children feel less anxious while also supporting their ability to think more flexibly.

Table 5 *Staffing for individual teams in CHO 9*

Team	Population	WTE During MHC Inspection (January 2023)	% AVfC (Clinical)	Current WTE (March 2023)	% AVfC (Clinical)
Swords	93,716	Clinical: 15.3 Admin: 1.8	74%	Clinical: 15.8 Admin: 1	77%
Ballymun/Finglas	84,586	Clinical: 12 Ad-min: 1	64%	Clinical: 13 Admin: 0.9	70%
Coolock/Darndale	48,855	Clinical: 10.2 Admin: 1	95%	Clinical: 11.5 Admin: 1	107%
Balbriggan	56,821	Clinical: 13.6 Admin: 2	109%	Clinical: 14.6 Admin: 1	117%
Castleknock	52,301	Clinical: 9.1 Admin: 1	79%	Clinical: 8.1 Admin: 1	70%
North Inner City	136,932	Clinical: 10.8 Admin: 1	36%	Clinical: 10.8 Admin: 1	36%
North East City	90,600	Clinical: 16.1 Admin: 1.6	81%	Clinical: 14.6 Admin: 1.6	73%
Blanchardstown	57,594	Clinical: 11.3 Admin: 1	89%	Clinical: 10.3 Admin: 1	81%

Numbers supplied by CHO

*Whole time equivalents

Table 5 sourced from: https://www.mhcirl.ie/sites/default/files/2023-08/CHO 9 Report FINAL.pdf

The Core Aims of CalmoKids

CalmoKids is built on the principle that emotional support should be accessible, inclusive, and embedded into children's everyday lives regardless of socioeconomic background. Only a small proportion of children currently have access to any consistent form of support, and many go without help until difficulties become much harder to manage.

A key aim is ensuring that emotional support reaches as many children as possible, early, preventively, and without stigma. The platform is grounded in the belief that consistent access to emotional tools, even in small ways, can have a powerful effect not only on a child's well-being but on the future health of communities at large.

With roots in child psychology, education, and emotional development, the CalmoKids team understands the value of building essential skills: emotional awareness, regulation, recognition, and expression. These aren't merely "*nice to have*" abilities but essential foundations for resilience, empathy, and social learning.

The platform also acknowledges the critical role of parents, caregivers, and educators in shaping emotional environments. Parent-focused content offers evidence-informed strategies, new perspectives, and practical, everyday guidance. By creating an experience that children and parents can share without pressure, CalmoKids aims to strengthen the emotional fabric of families, not just individual children.

Features and Implementation

CalmoKids stands apart from typical wellbeing apps through its foundation in science, empathy, and child-centred design. Its core features include:

- ✓ **Self-Regulation Journey**: A gamified, AI-supported emotional journey introducing children to skills like mindfulness, stress reduction, storytelling, drawing, dancing, and breathing, tailored dynamically based on preferences and parent-provided insight.
- ✓ **Mindfulness Activities**: Child-friendly tools for introducing breathwork, grounding, meditation, and present-moment awareness.
- ✓ **Emotional Awareness Tools**: Interactive exercises helping children recognise and label emotions, build empathy, and practice safe emotional expression.
- ✓ **Sensory Games**: Activities developed to support children with varying sensory needs, based on profiles gathered through parent and caregiver insights.

The platform is careful to position itself as complementary to, rather than a replacement for, other forms of care. CalmoKids is not:

- ✓ A replacement for therapy or clinical care
- ✓ A passive gaming app
- ✓ A one-size-fits-all solution
- ✓ Built without expertise. The team comprises experienced professionals across psychology, education, and digital design

Looking Forward

As technology becomes an inseparable part of childhood, CalmoKids aims to transform screen time into a space for growth, not to distract or overstimulate, but to support, soothe, and engage in meaningful ways. The app experience is built with intention: personalised, ethical, and rooted in research.

In short, CalmoKids strives to be a trusted companion in children's digital lives, a space supporting everyday emotional needs, helping develop core life skills, preventing difficulties before they escalate, and making mental well-being both approachable and enjoyable. The platform embodies a belief in the potential of AI not to replace care, but to extend it; not to de-personalise, but to empower, and always for good.

As children navigate an increasingly complex world, platforms like CalmoKids represent an innovative approach to ensuring that emotional well-being remains a priority, not just in therapeutic contexts but in the everyday digital experiences that now form a significant part of childhood development.

CalmoKids can be found here: https://www.calmokids.com/


www.exploringedtech.ie