

Huge achievement and future potential of Shannon Estuary illustrated brilliantly by students from local counties

Salesian College, Pallaskenry claim top honours in SFPC's Compass Transition Year Schools Competition

Monday, 13 February 2017: The Shannon Estuary's current significance and future potential as shipping corridor of international importance was called out by students across the counties of Clare, Kerry and Limerick as Salesian College, Pallaskenry claimed the second, biennial Compass Transition Year Schools Competition on Friday.

The final of the Shannon Foynes Port Company competition, devised to give students a deeper understanding of the company and estuary's potential, was attended by over 300 students and teachers as All-Ireland winning player and manager Davy Fitzgerald and MEP Sean Kelly presented the winners with the top prize of a €2,000 cheque for their school and iPads & COMPASS gold medals for each of the team members. All runners up received a COMPASS silver medal and a "Taste of Sailing Course" kindly sponsored by the Foynes Yacht Club Sailing Academy which was recently awarded the ISA Volvo ISA Training Centre of the Year 2016.

Held at the Foynes Aviation & Maritime Museum, the Compass (Creating Our Marine, Ports and Schools Synergy) Transition Year Schools Competition drew 41 entries from across the estuary counties, with six finalists chosen to go head to head with 10 minute presentations on the theme 'Great Ships Need Deep Water' at the packed museum's historically styled O'Regan Function Room.

The six schools were St. Patrick' Comprehensive, Shannon, Co. Clare; Causeway Comprehensive, Co. Kerry; Salesian College, Pallaskenry; Colaiste Mhuire Askeaton; Castletroy College and Laurel Hill Secondary School from Limerick.

The students laid out a range of dynamic and far-seeing proposals ranging from the winner's suggestion – illustrated across a 3D presentation - of a major transshipment centre at Ballylongford, complete with a rail link to Foynes. The deep-waters at Ballylongford would ensure that the world's largest ships could be accommodated, carrying larger loads and, as a result, delivering an environmental benefit with less ships having to sail.

Runners-up Laurel Hill, with an eye-catching presentation, set out the concept for an app to attract investors to the estuary, with the investment opportunity illustrated across a number of pages, including investment opportunities and photos of various sites. They even finished their presentation with a few well-sung lines of Christy Moore's 'The Voyage', to emphasise the teamwork

Other concepts included Colaiste Mhuire Askeaton's proposed alliance with a major Portuguese port to help capitalise on Brexit opportunities; St. Patrick's Comprehensive's focus on capitalising on deep sea ports, including through a major hub facility at Ballylongford; Castletroy College's development of an eco port system, again with a Ballylongford focus; Casuseway Comprehensive's concepts also for the Tarbert-Ballylongford landbank and its potential for handling the largest vessels in the world.

Addressing the large crowd before the winners were announced, MEP Sean Kelly said it was clear that the students had captured the enormous potential of the estuary. "I thought I knew everything I needed to know about the estuary, about the company's activities but I learned more today from these young student. Well done to the Port authority on pulling this competition together, which

shows again the sense of community there is around the estuary, which sends a great message to potential investors that if they come here, they will be very welcome.

“To the six teams, all I can say is your school would be very proud of you. It takes a lot of work and effort and you deserve great courage for not just the innovative and workmanlike approach you gave to this but for simply getting up on stage and giving us really interesting presentations, without exception.”

Davy Fitzgerald echoed the MEP’s comments as he delivered an inspirational address, much of it focussed on the inner potential of the students themselves but also on the potential of the estuary. “To be honest, I’m taken back by a number of things, most especially the confidence of these young students to get up in front of a large crowd and deliver presentations like that. I’ve been educated by them as to the incredible development and economic success here on the estuary already and its enormous potential.

“We may have lost our way somewhat as a nation during the so-called boom years but the recession may not have been a bad thing at all as it has forced us to look at our natural assets like the estuary. It can drive industry, create jobs and make this part of Ireland and even better place to live and work.”

Shannon Foynes Port Company CEO Pat Keating said that the competition was most definitely delivering on its objectives – to drive a greater understanding of the huge commercial importance already of the Shannon Estuary and its enormous potential. “It’s safe to say that before all the schools who entered this competition even got started, few of them knew about things like the 3,600 jobs or annual trade of €7.4bn that the estuary supports. But they got to grips with it quickly and the presentations today showed not just that but the awareness of the shipping industry they have garnered at an international level.

“It’s clear that the students put a lot of hard work and effort into the projects. They took ownership and showed initiative and in many instances consulted broadly outside their comfort zone, engaging with business leaders and representatives among others. I was particularly impressed that they thought big and looked beyond national borders.”

Ends

