

# Aiming high



## Dean Flanagan spoke to Alison Moore about his new role as president of the European Nursing Student Association

DEAN FLANAGAN, INMO new graduate and student officer, was elected as the president of the European Nursing Student Association (ENSA) at its recent annual meeting which was hosted by the INMO in Dublin.

While ENSA is more than 30 years in existence, it only recently became a legally recognised body and Dean will be the first president leading the association under a legal constitution that enables lobbying and involvement in projects affecting nursing students across Europe.

The AGM took place over four days from October 24 to 28, with representatives from 18 countries taking part. As ENSA is now working in close collaboration with EFN (the European Federation of Nurses Associations), it took place at the same time as the EFN Conference, also hosted by the INMO.

Dean explained that the conference focused on two main themes: standardising nursing education at degree level and gender equality within nursing.

"Following work at the conference we've prepared questionnaires on gender equality to be sent, hopefully within the next month, to the ENSA Board where we'll prepare a working document and a statement for EU.

"Next year, we will look to make a statement to the EU that the degree should be the level that all European countries should look to achieve for nursing students," said Dean.

The issue of gender equality in nursing has been high on ENSA's agenda for several years now. Dean explained why this issue was so important to the group.

"For example, until a few years ago, it was illegal for men in Turkey to become nurses. Then we examined the experiences in other countries where they have changed the way nursing has been advertised, which has encouraged more men to come on board. In Croatia this has had a big influence, with 27% more men taking it up since they've started marketing nurs-

ing as a gender equal profession."

Of those males who do enter nursing, according to Dean, they tend to see their career path leading to management rather than clinically-based roles, so ENSA is trying to encourage them to see that there is a future for them in the clinical end of nursing rather than just administrative.

To this end, ENSA currently has a mini video series in production that promotes males in clinical practice.

"We got the nurses from across Europe to do little webcasts of why they have joined nursing and why they're sticking in nursing, and we're compiling them into a short film," said Dean.

He explained that Ireland was no different to the rest of Europe with only about 7-10% of the profession being male and with a high percentage going down a managerial path.

While ENSA won't become involved in any issues on a national level, they will be working toward a better standard of

undergraduate education across the continent. According to Dean, Ireland compares very well in terms of education.

"We have a degree programme in place and the research shows that patient mortality rates are lower when nurses are degree educated. While Ireland's education system did fare better than the likes of Spain, Portugal, Croatia and Germany, we still have a bit to be improved on to catch Scandinavian countries, in particular," he said.

However, Dean stressed that the level of clinical practice time that Irish students benefit from, is not afforded to most other European students who simply do not get the clinical experience that Irish nurses get before registration.

"It is easy to see why the Irish degree is so valued, even in the likes of the UK where the training is three years. That extra year that we have along with our internship really does pack a punch in our degree when competing with the European mainland countries.

"In Germany they have two different steps to nursing. One is a degree but only 7% of nurses take this option. So ENSA would like to standardise education across Europe so that it means a nurse in Germany, the UK or Spain would be the same as the nurse from Ireland and the same as a nurse from the Scandinavian countries.

"And because we now have that piece of paper to say that we're a legalised body, we can do that by lobbying at the EU," he said.

These are very much long-term goals for ENSA and in order to achieve them Dean explained that the Board's terms of office would have to be extended from one to two years in order to achieve continuity.

"We will be looking to make it far more consistent where the immediate Board that leaves is still involved in the Organisation before fully handing over the reins. So, I'm hoping to still be involved this time next year for a second term."

One of the challenges facing the new ENSA board is how to get its business done when the members are scattered across the continent.

"My vice-president is from Norway. The other board members are from Denmark, France and Turkey. Thankfully, with the invention of Skype, it is very easy to keep in contact. So, we have meetings every second week and update people on where we are," said Dean.

One of Dean's aims for his ENSA presidency is to establish a good working



Pictured at the ENSA annual meeting in INMO HQ in Dublin recently were (top photo, l-r): Newly elected ENSA Board members – Delphine Thézé, France; Mia Andersen, Norway; Dean Flanagan, Ireland; Erdinc Demirer, Turkey; and Sanne Nyquist, Denmark  
(Lower photo) ENSA delegates from 18 European countries hard at work during the conference

relationship with the other European student organisations such as the European Pharmaceutical Organisation, the Dental Doctors Association, the Student Doctors Association and the Student Physiotherapists Association.

"We are working to create a summit where we're all going to meet. We have already had our first meeting, via Skype to discuss this. The aim of this summit is going to be about the inter-professional collaboration not only at the national level but at the European level. This would be the first time that all the student organisations have ever got together to discuss healthcare in their countries," said Dean.

This collaboration of student organisations will ultimately strive to embed a multidisciplinary approach in undergraduate training and in student organisation interaction.

"We don't want people to approach healthcare anymore with the view that the various professions are completely separate, rather that everyone works together," he said.

Dean explained that because ENSA has not been promoted very much in the past, the average student in Ireland would not know much about the group and its work, but he plans to change that by raising awareness here.