



Top: Noel Doyle, Cathy Stevenson, Paul Dunne[EES]

Bottom: Paulline Hoctor [Local Enterprise Carlow], Tomoko Doyle [EES]

Where the world meets Carlow

Equinox Education Services: A Local Enterprise Office Carlow 'Making It Happen' story

Noel and Tomoko Doyle first met while studying in the UK. They began a relationship soon after and moved to Tomoko's home country of Japan.

There, Tomoko's father ran a study abroad agency and upon his arrival, Noel took up a job as teacher and project manager and gained a first-hand perspective of teaching in and running an educational institution.

When the time came for Tomoko and Noel to start a family, the couple decided to return to Noel's home county of Carlow, where they could raise their children in a quiet rural setting.

Despite their initial plans, the couple did anything but settle for the quiet life. In 2005, inspired by Tomoko's

father, the couple set up Equinox Education Services, based just outside Carlow Town.

The business caters to international and Irish students seeking language and cultural experiences here and abroad. Thanks to Equinox, Irish students have had the opportunity to experience far-off lands and cultures on school exchange programmes, while students from Japan and worldwide are regular visitors to Carlow.

"We provide a cultural experience as well as a learning experience," says Noel. "Everything is tailor-made, whether it's a visiting Japanese choir that would like to interact with local choirs here, or whether it's just students who wish to come and experience what Ireland has to offer."

Tomoko's own experiences as an international student have helped shape Equinox's vision. "Studying abroad really gave me a lot of good influences in my life," she says. "I would love to give those experiences to all Irish students who want to study abroad as well, and for whoever else comes to Ireland."

After a decade of business and Equinox's growing popularity with Irish and international students, Noel and Tomoko reached the limits of what they could handle by themselves.

"We approached the Local Enterprise Office here in Carlow. They were very instrumental in the next stage of Equinox," says Noel.

Reaching out to the globe

By offering both financial grants and learning programmes to new and growing local businesses, the Local Enterprise Office in Carlow helps entrepreneurs to develop their products, scale in Ireland and internationally, and expand into new markets.

"Equinox availed of the Business Expansion Grant, which allowed them to take on some more employees, which then allowed them to expand into new markets and develop out further in existing markets," says Pauline Hoctor, Senior Enterprise Development Officer at the Local Enterprise Office.

The Business Expansion Grant is available to micro-businesses after their initial 18-month start-up period. Founders can avail of up to €80,000 in funding to help them hire new employees or purchase new services and equipment.

Local businesses can also benefit from a feasibility

grant to conduct market research; a priming grant for new start-ups in the first stages; and the Trading Online Voucher Scheme for e-commerce.

"Equinox availed of the Trading Online Voucher Scheme, which is a grant available to small businesses to help them build their online platform, such as an e-commerce strategy, look at their digital strategy, and improve their approach to online marketing."

With the financial assistance of the Local Enterprise Office in Carlow, Equinox hired a fulltime business development manager (allowing them to proactively pursue new educational partnerships in more countries) and increase their capacity for international students as well as other full time staff.

"We continue to rely on the support of the Local Enterprise Office here in Carlow, and their support has allowed us to get where we are today," says Noel.

"Their continued support will allow us to grow well into the future."

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Noel Doyle,
Equinox Education Services

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Pauline Hoctor,
Local Enterprise Office
Carlow

*If you have a business idea, talk to us.
Together, we can make it happen.*