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Project to unite Irish-Indian community

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A new project aimed at bringing the Irish-Indian community together will be established in Dublin today. The "Integrating Indians" project will be announced by the Ireland-India Council, an organisation that fosters business and cultural links between Ireland and India.

The council estimates that between 7,000 and 9,000 Indians live in the Republic, working in areas such as medicine and information technology, or studying. The project is being launched in Griffith College, which hosts 300 students from India.

Prashant Shukla, trustee of the Ireland- India Council, said the project was designed to help the Indian community to integrate here. He said the community was varied in terms of religion and language and the project would also encourage different Indian communities to come together.

Religions practised by Indian people in this State include the Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian, Buddhists, Jain and Parsi faiths. Indian people here speak more than 25 languages but Hindi and English are the most common.

A series of events had been organised to foster these links, Mr Shukla said.

As well as bringing Indian people together, the project is trying to foster links between them and the indigenous Irish and other multicultural communities in this State. It is also hoping to encourage entrepreneurship and improve professional skills among the Indian diaspora.

Mr Shukla also said the Indian community in Ireland was very pleased that Bollywood actress Shilpa Shetty had won *Celebrity Big Brother* on Sunday. She was the firm favourite in the Channel 4 reality television contest after becoming the victim of alleged racist bullying.

More than 40,000 complaints about the programme were made to media watchdog Ofcom.

"We were very happy that she won, it is very good for India," Mr Shukla said. He did not want to get into the controversy surrounding the allegations about racism as the programme was just a game.

People from India have been coming to Ireland for many years, mainly to study. Up to recently they usually returned home afterwards because of the lack of work, and difficulties in bringing families here.

In 1970, fewer than a dozen people of Indian origin had migrated to this State. But since 1990, numbers have increased dramatically as Ireland became more accessible for overseas workers and students.