National Report on Lifelong Learning in Ireland

LLL2010: Sub-Project 1:
Towards a Lifelong Learning
Society in Europe –
The Contribution of
the Education System

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LifeLong Learning 2010

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By

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Contents

Glossary of Abbreviations:

ABE	Adult Basic Education
ALCE	Adult Literacy and Community Education
ALS	Adult Literacy Service
AT	Assistive Technology
AONTAS	Irish National Association of Adult Education
BTEA	Back to Education Allowance
CSO	Central Statistics Office
CES	Community Employment Scheme
CPA	Combat Poverty Agency
CSF	Community Support Framework
DCU	Dublin City University
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DES	Department of Education and Science
DETE	Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment
DSFA	Department of Social and Family Affairs
EDC	Educational Disadvantage Centre
EGFSN	Expert Group on Future Skills Needs
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
EUCEN	European Universities Continuing Education Network
FÁS	Fóras Aiseanna Saothair – National Training & Employment Authority
FETAC	Further Education and Training Awards Council
HEA	Higher Education Authority
HETAC	Higher Education and Training Awards Council
HSCL	Home, School, Community Liaison
HSE	Health Service Executive
IALS	International Adult Literacy Survey
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
ISC	Information Society Commission
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
ITABE	Intensive Tuition in Adult Basic Education
IVEA	Irish Vocational Educational Association

LALB	Local Adult Learning Boards
LANPAG	Local Authority National Partnership Board
NALA	National Adult Literacy Agency
NALC	National Adult Learning Council
NAPS	National Anti-Poverty Strategy
NAPs/incl	National Action Plan Against Poverty and Social Exclusion
NDP	National Development Plan
NESC	National Economic and Social Council
NEWB	National Education Welfare Board
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
NLN	National Learning Network
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NQAI	National Qualifications Authority of Ireland
NUI	National University of Ireland
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PLC	Post Leaving Certificate
PPF	Programme for Prosperity and Fairness
RTE	Radio Telefís Eireann
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
RTDI	Regional Technological Development and Innovation
SDG	Standards Development Group
STTC	Senior Traveller Training Centre
TLA	Third Level Allowance
TCD	Trinity College Dublin
TSI	Teaching Skills initiative
U3A	University of the 3rd Age
VEC	Vocational Education Committee
VTOS	Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme
WEN	Women's Education Network

Preface: Overview of LLL2010 Research Project

Set within the overall context of the enlargement of the European Union and increased globalisation, in pursuance of the Lisbon agenda and funded through the European Commission's 6th Framework Research Programme, the research project *Towards a Lifelong Learning Society in Europe: The Contribution of the Education System* (LLL2010) focuses on 'the contribution of education system to the process of making lifelong learning a reality for all and its role as a potential agent for social integration within Europe'.[1]

The main aims and objectives of LLL2010 include: examining the effect of country-specific institutions on access of adults to the education system, assessing the effectiveness of access policies and practices across the participating EU member states, as well as in associated countries and ascertaining their implications for the creation of a European knowledge society alongside enhanced social cohesion across the European Union.

Inclusive of the Educational Disadvantage Centre, St. Patrick's College as the Irish partner, a total of fourteen research institutions comprise the LLL2010 research consortium, which is led by the Estonian team based at the University of Tallinn.[2]

The research teams represent EU member-states from Northern, Central, Western and Eastern Europe and associated states, accompanied by Russia. The differing historical, political, economic and cultural backgrounds of the participating member states and regions make the project consortium a particularly rich source of comparative data in terms of the conceptualisation and practice of lifelong learning across the European and in a wider international context.

Having commenced in September 2005, the LLL2010 research project extends over five years, with the research tasks addressed using diverse methodologies, through five sub-projects. These sub-projects are briefly outlined:

Sub-Project 1: Examines the extent to which the participating member states and regions lifelong learning policies and initiatives address issues with which LLL2010 is centrally concerned, namely, human and social capital concepts, active citizenship, knowledge society and social inclusion.

Sub-Project 2: Draws on national data primarily from the Eurostat Adult Education Survey (AES) to examine the participation and non-participation of adults in formal learning activities (vocational training, different forms of basic, secondary and tertiary education) across the participating member states and regions.

Sub-Project 3: Seeks to obtain in-depth comparative information about adult learners' perspectives of the formal provision for LLL across participating member states and regions through the undertaking of a survey of 1000 adult learners drawn from ISCED levels 1 through 6.

Sub-Project 4: Set within a workplace context, Sub-Project 4 involves an examination of the role of employers in developing access and motivation of employees to participate in LLL.

Sub-Project 5: Investigates the role of educational institutions in relation to the promotion of access of adults to the education system. The Irish research team in the Educational Disadvantage Centre are the European co-ordinators for the consortium on this sub-project, which is set to commence in January 2009.

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[1] Cf. http:// LLL2010.tlu.ee
[2] See Appendix 2 for a list of research institutions participating in LLL2010.

Purpose of the Report

This national report has been compiled in pursuance of the research team's commitment to the LLL2010 project, and more specifically to Sub-Project 1 of the project. The overall aims of Sub-Project 1 included: a critical assessment of the concept of lifelong learning at various levels; an investigation and development of a typology/typologies of different policies and initiatives across the participating member states and regions and a mapping of the range of initiatives to encourage the participation of socially excluded groups in lifelong learning.

As part of Sub-Project 1, each research team's task was to review how lifelong learning is conceptualised and put into operation within their national and, or regional context. Each team was charged with producing a national report following the template agreed by the research consortium, specifically referencing historical, theoretical, policy and practice related information.

The key objective of this report was to provide country-specific input on the policies and practice of lifelong learning in Ireland to enable comparison of data across the other participating member states and regions in terms of the role the education system plays in lifelong learning. The final comparative report may be accessed via the project website.

Research Process

The research process adopted in the preparation of this report may be divided across three discrete phases.

The first phase of the research process involved discussion, negotiation and consensus within the research consortium as to the content and structural requirements of the national reports. This phase was undertaken in an attempt to harmonise the structure and type of information being sought by each research team within their national/regional settings.

The collation and compilation of the data into the national report format formed the basis of the second phase of the research process. In compiling the national report, representatives from a number of key lifelong learning organisations were formally consulted along with the team's sourcing and analysis of relevant national, European and international legislative measures, policy documents and academic literature.

In the third and final research phase, the consultation process was continued and developed whereby a final draft of the national report was disseminated to and feedback invited from a wide range of core lifelong learning organisations, both statutory and non-governmental. Alongside a range of organisations which indicated their support for the research undertaken, a number of organisations actively participated in this phase of the research, including: the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI); Enable Ireland; Fóras Aiseanna Saothair – National Training & Employment Authority (FÁS); the Irish Vocational Educational Association (IVEA); the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA); the National Learning Network and the Vocational Opportunities Scheme (VTOS).

This final report presents data compiled by the research team up to the end of January 2008. The contents of the report are the responsibility of the authors.

Structure of the Report

The structure of the report follows through from a template agreed on by the research consortium. The report is divided into nine main sections following on from the Introduction:

Introduction: Historical Background to Lifelong Learning
1. Theoretical Perspectives
2. Influence of Conceptualisations and Drivers on Lifelong Learning Policy and Practice
3. Understandings and Operationalisations of Lifelong Learning
4. Significance of Key Concepts in Lifelong Learning Policy
5. Legislation and Policy
6. Main Patterns of Provision and Participation
7. Broader Social Policy and Lifelong Learning
8. Effectiveness of Lifelong Learning
9. Policy Recommendations

Introduction: Historical background to LLL

In the past decade, Ireland has moved from a country with high unemployment and net emigration to one of net immigration and unemployment rates of 4.7%.[3] In the 5-year period, 2002-2006, alone, the labour force has increased by approximately 17% with foreign nationals representing almost half the increase in employment in that period and accounting for almost one in eight workers in Ireland (Census, 2006).[4]

Despite this recent economic growth,[5] Central Statistics Office (CSO) (2006) figures indicate that for close to one in every six of the adult population, over the age of 15, the highest level of education achieved is at primary level. Furthermore, 38% of our current population, over the age of 15 whose full-time education has ceased, have not completed secondary education, and Ireland has the second lowest level of literacy among 22 countries surveyed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Report of International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) (2000). In that survey, 24% of Irish adults, almost one in four adults, were found to have a level of literacy below that required for fully effective participation in society. There is growing recognition that widening participation in lifelong learning must be reinforced in the future if Ireland is to capitalise on its economic success over the last decade or so (OECD, 2004).

Historically, Ireland has had a strong community-based adult education sector underpinned by high levels of volunteerism. As a consequence, social forces have always been viewed as key drivers, alongside the economic forces at play, in the promotion of lifelong learning agenda. Lifelong learning is seen as key to personal development and social inclusion as '…*education empowers individuals to participate fully and creatively in their communities'*. (Department of Education and Science, 1995). Building on the Green Paper on Adult Education (1998) and driven very much by the E.U. agenda on lifelong learning, the Irish Government published its White Paper on Adult Education entitled Learning for Life (2000).

The White Paper represents our most significant policy development in adult education/lifelong learning, to date. Crucially, the White Paper marks the adoption of lifelong learning as the 'governing principle' of education policy in the Republic of Ireland.

In setting out its policy objectives for lifelong learning, a number of core themes are highlighted, namely, that lifelong learning should embrace personal, cultural and social goals as well as economic ones and be seen as promoting collective as well as personal advancement.[6] Additionally, the needs of marginalized groups are to be addressed explicitly and the role of community education providers in the field of adult education is to be strengthened.

Underpinning the overall framework of lifelong learning are 6 areas of priority:

- Consciousness Raising: to realise full potential; self-discovery; personal and collective development
- Citizenship: to grow in self-confidence, social awareness and social responsibility and to take a proactive role in shaping the overall direction at societal and community decision-making.
- Cohesion: to enhance social capital and empower those particularly disadvantaged.
- Competitiveness: the role in providing a skilled workforce
- Cultural Development: the role of adult education in enriching the cultural fabric of society.
- Community Development: the role of adult education in the development of community with a collective sense of purpose[7]

Rather than being merely a tag on to the economic rationale for lifelong learning, the White Paper prioritises the issue of social cohesion through its emphasis on active citizenship through personal, community and cultural development.

Links between formal education and lifelong learning

The Department of Education and Science (DES) and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DETE) have joint policy responsibility for lifelong

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[3] Central Statistics Office figures December 2007
[4] Central Statistics Office, *2006 Census of Population* at www.cso.ie. Cf. also Barrett & McCarthy (2006)
[5] Which at the time of publishing, shows some signs of moderating
[6] White Paper on Education (2000)
[7] See Bane (2007), Owens (2007), Waters (2007) & Higgins (2007) for accounts of community development in Ireland in recent decades

learning. The Irish government has designated a Minister of State, located within the Department of Education and Science, with special responsibility for Adult Education, Youth Affairs and Educational Disadvantage.

The Vocational Education sector represented through Vocational Education Committees (VECs) have played a critical role in the development of adult and second chance education to date, in Ireland. In practical terms, the VECs deliver more than 90% of Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) along with the *Youthreach* and Senior Traveller Training Centre (STTC) programmes for early school leavers, the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) for unemployed adults and the Adult Literacy Service (ALS).

While there are a range of adult and further education providers in the Republic of Ireland, the VEC sector has arguably[8] more adult learners than all other providers combined and could thus be considered the most pervasive adult education provider in the State.

In terms of links between the formal education system and lifelong learning, a number of key initiatives at each educational level have been developed with the promotion of lifelong learning as a core objective.

a) At both primary and secondary levels in 1999, the Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) scheme was introduced in schools with designated disadvantaged status. Central to this scheme is partnership and collaboration between parents and teachers in the interests of the child's learning. The Scheme is delivered through a co-ordinator (teacher), who is assigned to a school or group of schools and who works from the school-site, outreaching to the families and broader community, including providing education such as literacy support for families. The aims of the scheme are

• To maximise active participation of students in the learning process, in particular those who might be at risk of failure
• To promote active cooperation between home, school and relevant community agencies in promoting the educational interests of the children
• To raise awareness in parents of their own capacities to enhance their children's educational progress and to assist them in developing relevant skills and
• To enhance the children's uptake from education, their retention in the education system, their continuation to post-compulsory education and to third level and their attitudes to life-long learning.

b) Since 1988, the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment have been funding *Youthreach*, a key education programme which complements mainstream secondary education and facilitates the lifelong learning of those most at risk of educational disadvantage. The programme is directed specifically at unemployed young early school leavers aged 15-20 with no formal education or training qualifications. *Youthreach* programmes are offered in out-of-school settings located throughout the country, generally in socio-economically disadvantaged areas. While *Youthreach* is a national programme, centres are locally managed, and programmes reflect the particular social, economic and cultural environment in which they operate. The *Youthreach* programme focuses on the holistic development of the individual and is both participant-centred and participant-led. The programme follows trainees' identified interests and needs, with participants and staff acting as equal partners in the learning process. There is an emphasis on flexibility at all levels, including management, relationships and programme dimensions, as well as on recognising and rewarding achievement rather than reinforcing failure. Interactions are less formal and relationships with staff are often 'warmer' than in secondary schools (cf. Fingleton 2004; Downes, Maunsell & Ivers 2006) and many observers argue that this is an important component in the programme's success. The young people perceive themselves to be listened to and respected, i.e. treated as adults. Groups are relatively small - the tutor-learner ratio is about 10:1. Participants receive a financial stipend each week for participation. The programme works particularly positively with young people from the Travelling community and other ethnic minorities.

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[8] The Further Education and Training Awards Council (2005) highlights the difficulty in being definitive about enrolment / participation data because the details are collected in different ways by different providers. Also, the data collected does not differentiate between short and long term courses or between full time or part time courses. When it comes to self-funded, adult part-time courses, the situation is even less clear. The DES, relying on figures quoted in the White Paper of 2000, claims that these enrolments stood at 147,000 for all providers in 2000. Currently, the Association of Adult Education Directors in VEC schools and Colleges feel that enrolments in self-funded, adult part-time course in the VEC sector is in the vicinity of 55,000 annually.

c) FÁS, as Ireland's national training and employment authority, provides and delivers services and learning opportunities in a way that seeks to address social exclusion. The vision is that each learner will be given access to the skills, supports and resources needed to engage in learning on a lifelong basis. FÁS operates on a strong community partnership model networking closely with the community in which it is working. The core values of FÁS include: access for all, employability, equity, choices and integration. FÁS, in conjunction with the Vocational Education Committee, operate a Return to Education Programme which enables participants on FÁS funded Community Employment Schemes (CES) to be released half-time from their work experience programme to avail of a programme of 160 hours of literacy tuition by the VECs while still in receipt of their training allowance.[9]

d) A recent significant development in terms of promoting lifelong learning within the third-level education sector was the creation of the National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education. This facilitates educational access and opportunity for groups who are under-represented in higher education - those who experience socio-economic disadvantage, those with a disability and mature students – and provides financial incentives to universities to meet target numbers of these students through reserved places and Dedicated Access Officers.

Other key stakeholders:

There are a number of other key stakeholders from the Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Voluntary sector who have a central role to play in taking the Lifelong Learning Agenda forward and who identify themselves most easily and closely with the concept of Lifelong Learning, including the National Association of Adult Education (AONTAS) and the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA).[10]

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[9] Cf. The Implementation Guide for NALA/FÁS/VEC Return to Education Programmes NALA (2000) and the Evaluation Report of the NALA Return to Education Course NALA (1999) (both available on www.nala.ie).
[10] Report of the Taskforce on Lifelong Learning (2002) Dublin: Stationery Office.

Theoretical Perspectives

The Green Paper on Adult Education: *Education in an Era of Lifelong Learning* (1998) began a national debate and informed Government policy with regard to the role of Adult Education in meeting the challenges currently confronting Irish society. It espoused a holistic and inclusive system of education within an overall national policy commitment to lifelong learning. The rationale for investment in adult and community education, as explicated in the Green Paper, was not based '...entirely on economic considerations and issues of disadvantage, but also on the role of learning in creating a more democratic and civilised society by promoting culture, identity and well-being and by strengthening individuals, families and communities' (1998, p16).

The role of lifelong learning in the promotion of both active citizenship and community development has been enshrined in key education policy documents Furthermore, it is recognised that the development of lifelong learning in an Irish context needs to be underpinned by three core principles:

- A systematic approach requiring that '...educational policies must be designed to embrace the lifecycle, reflect the multiplicity of sites, both formal and informal, in which learning can take place, provide for appropriate supports such as guidance, counselling and childcare and for mechanisms to assess learning...'
- Equality '... of access, participation and outcome for participants in adult education, with proactive strategies to counteract barriers arising from differences of socio-economic status, gender, ethnicity and disability...'
- 'Inter-culturalism inviting the need to frame educational policy and practice in the context of serving a diverse population as opposed to a uniform one, and the development of curricula, materials, training and in-service, modes of assessment and delivery methods which accept such diversity as the norm...'

<div align="right">(White Paper on Adult Education,
Learning for Life, 2000, p13)</div>

The Department of Education and Science (DES) also has a number of high priority goals, which are clearly embedded in the lifelong learning imperative, namely;

- To promote equity and inclusion and quality outcomes
- To promote lifelong learning
- To plan for education that is relevant to personal, social, cultural and economic needs

<div align="right">(DES Annual Report 2002)</div>

To this end the DES aims to substantially improve attainment levels at first and second levels and eliminate early school leaving and to ensure that all those completing secondary level education have, at a minimum, an adequate standard of basic skills. The DES is engaged in a wide range of activities covering the key elements of policy planning, quality assurance, resourcing, regulation and evaluation, as well as providing a broad range of support services for the education sector.

There is a need to bring integration of adult education with primary school parental involvement. The connection of these two levels has been emphasised in 2005 by the Statutory Committee on Educational Disadvantage.

Our team's theoretical perspective mirrors the priority areas of the White Paper:

- Consciousness Raising.
- Citizenship
- Cohesion
- Competitiveness
- Cultural Development
- Community Development

<div align="right">(White Paper 2002, p12)</div>

Our holistic, eclectic approach encompasses elements of radical community development, liberal and humanistic personal development and economic rationales for lifelong learning. The example of the literacy needs of prisoners illustrates how all of these approaches are important and are potentially complementary. Morgan & Kett (2003) note high levels of early school leaving and literacy problems among the prison population, both male and female; such high levels of literacy problems also existed in younger prisoners despite the fact that literacy problems tend to be significantly higher among older groups compared to younger groups in the general population. Education as self-development, literacy skills (including

the arts and literacy), as well as economic rationales, all combine in a complementary fashion for this group. The main competing perspective in Ireland is not so much ideological as simply giving financial priority to adult education over other areas. Figures from 2005 indicate that expenditure on adult and community education accounted for approximately 2.2% of the Department of Education and Science's overall budget. Currently, less than 3 euros out of every 100 spent by the Department of Education and Science is spent on adult education – though it is recognised as a key part of the lifelong learning agenda. This is despite it being explicitly acknowledged by the Irish Government that

one of Ireland's economic and social vulnerabilities to meeting its objectives is the slow roll out of the lifelong learning agenda. There is little doubt that the range of reports and structures and the weight of Irish Government activity provide clear evidence of its pursuing the lifelong learning agenda. However, with regard to self-development as a natural by-product of adult education and lifelong learning, community education groups nationwide report a growing unease at the de-emphasis in education for the improvement in social capital and a move toward the ethos of education for economic reasons.

Influence of Conceptualisations and Drivers on LLL Policy and Practice

Addressing Social and Educational Inequality/Access and Widening Participation

With regard to access to higher education, there are a range of schemes and measures available to assist students from disadvantaged backgrounds to avail of third level and further education. The National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education is the key driver in this area. The measures include:

- Lowering of entry requirements for courses at third level for socio-economically marginalized groups, with alternative requirements such as essay, interview and/or aptitude test plus references. Similar positive discrimination for access to third level for mature students and students with a disability.
- Fee reduction and/or suspension. There is a continuing debate/argument over third level fees in that part-time courses are fee paying and full time ones not.
- Provision of Back to Education Allowances/ Grant Aid.
- Access courses and dedicated full-time College Access Officers in every university and full-time mature students' officers.
- Outreach initiatives, as well as university campus visits for students from traditionally socio-economically disadvantaged areas, visits for primary and secondary school students to break down cultural barriers and to introduce them to students who can serve as role models for them as many will know no one who has ever been to third level
- Community education.
- Mentoring and peer supports for access students.
- College tutors and writing workshop supports
- On site childcare - "no crèche-no class"
- Financial incentives for third level institutions to increase access for socio-economically marginalized groups, including ethnic minorities. The institutions compete for state funding based on their performance with regard to increasing access.
- Modularisation of courses

Active Citizenship/Social Inclusion/ Personal Development Dimensions

The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA), in their Learners' Development Plan outline a range of activities that aim to promote active citizenship and empowerment. This is through a range of initiatives and courses available to adult learners that will enable learners to develop skills and become more confident in participation in decision-making, group work and facilitation and engagement in wider society.

A Government Task Force on Active Citizenship was established in April 2006 to determine how to promote greater citizen participation in communities and in society. The Task Force is to consider on a broad basis the policies and actions at official level which can help or hinder civic engagement, while on an individual level it will seek to identify the supports which help encourage people to become involved and to stay involved.

Lifelong Learning in Ireland is very much driven by social inclusion, personal development and self-actualisation along with emphasis on economic drivers (cf. White Paper, 2000).

Gaps

- There is a clear need for the Department of Education and Science to promote a dedicated plan[11] to support the speedier implementation of the White Paper and increase the proportion of education budget to lifelong learning.
- There is no maintenance grant support for students on part-time courses[12].
- The Irish Statutory Committee on Educational Disadvantage (2005) highlighted the need for 'a dedicated family literacy budget', a point echoed by Barnardos (2006) *Make the Grade* document. This dedicated budget has yet to be assigned.
- There is no master concept of lifelong learning to be found among the many policy documents
- The Higher Education Authority - HEA (2005) report concludes that: 'Community-based funding to achieve equity of access has been limited in scope, with only one, relatively small, source

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[11] With specific remit in relation to adult literacy, the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education and Science Report on Adult Literacy (May 2006) asserted that the National Adult Literacy and Numeracy Implementation Plan proposed by the National Adult Literacy Advisory Group (NALA, October 2004) be adopted and used as a starting point in the planning for the full implementation of the National Adult Literacy Programme, 2007-2013. *Towards 2016* states that future development in adult literacy should be informed by the implementation plan of the national adult literacy advisory group and published by NALA).

[12] An additional 'special rate of maintenance' or 'top-up' was introduced in 2000. The scheme assists grant applicants from households who are in receipt of certain long-term social welfare payments. Such students receive an additional 'top-up' amount to the standard maintenance grant (HEA 2005, p.6).

available, namely the Millennium Fund. There seems to be considerable potential in whole-community and region-based responses to achieve equity of access' (p24).

- The Home-School Community Liaison Scheme tends to be confined to the hours of the school day when many parents are working. There is a need for expansion of the scope of this scheme to include working with the parents in evening times (Downes & Maunsell 2007).

Understandings and Operationalisations of LLL

Lifelong Learning is understood and defined in this country as:

"...All purposeful learning activity, whether formal or informal, undertaken on an ongoing basis with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence."

(NESC, 1999, p270)

The National Economic and Social Council report also stresses the importance of lifelong learning for improving not just employability but considers it to be 'essential for personal fulfilment outside the labour market as well' (p270).

Within the Irish context, the lifelong learning agenda has come to be based on three fundamental attributes:

- It is **lifelong** and therefore concerns everything from the cradle to the grave
- It is **life-wide** recognising that learning occurs in many different settings
- It focuses on **learning** rather than limits itself to education (White Paper, Learning for Life 2000).

The White Paper, in recognising Adult and Community Education as a key sector in the lifelong learning continuum, defined adult education as 'systematic learning undertaken by adults who return to learning having concluded initial education or training' (p32).

Interface of Lifelong Learning with Formal Education -

There is greater recognition that the formal education system in Ireland is fundamental to lifelong learning, rather than a separate set of provisions that precedes it. Despite this, there is as yet little evidence of a more fundamental rethinking of this distinct role of formal educational settings which there should be to meet the challenge posed by lifelong and lifewide learning.

The Operationalisation of Lifelong Learning in Ireland

A number of key recommendations listed in the White Paper have been or are currently being implemented including:

- The National Adult Literacy Programme

- The Back to Education Initiative
- The Adult Education Guidance Initiative and
- The Appointment of Community Education Facilitators

However, both the Green and White Papers on adult education and lifelong learning proposed the provision of national and local structures, in the form of a National Adult Learning Council (NALC) and Local Adult Learning Boards (LALB), respectively, which have not been implemented. The objective was to develop an integrated and strategic framework for the development of the lifelong learning sector. Such a structure would provide for an area based approach to assessing priority lifelong learning needs at local level, support a cross fertilisation of expertise within a common quality framework and enable the range of lifelong learning providers to work effectively together[13]. The NALC, although established in 2002, albeit on a non-statutory basis, was suspended in 2003 never having met.

Furthermore, a range of other significant recommendations of the White Paper, at time of writing of this report, have yet to be operationalised including:

- The establishment of an inter-agency working group on the recognition of qualifications for adult education practitioners.
- Paid educational leave.
- Flexible delivery mechanisms, in all areas, including adult literacy.
- A national survey of adult literacy to be undertaken on a cyclical (tri-annual) basis.

Accreditation/Certification of Learning

The Report of the Taskforce on Lifelong Learning (2002) acknowledges that lifelong learning requires that the qualifications framework encompasses prior learning. Furthermore the Report states that the accreditation approach should be a broad one and not confined to formal learning, thus including learning on-the-job, uncertified community-based learning and self-directed learning.

[13] Seanad Debates Official Report March 1st 2000

The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) is currently working to standardise qualifications so that transfers between institutions and the recognition of prior certified learning can be facilitated.

Some initiatives have been undertaken; following on from the approval of the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) policy on the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), a pilot implementation commenced in December 2005. The purpose of the pilot was to assess and identify implementation issues relating to providers and FETAC regarding the recognition of prior learning. It is anticipated that the pilot will help facilitate the development of RPL by providers in the context of their own education and training services.

Overall, however, progress is slow, not only in relation to RPL but also in terms of the development of Levels 1 and 2 of the qualifications framework. Currently no awards at Level 1 and 2 have been made, no learners are on programmes leading to these awards, no

programmes have been validated by providers with FETAC at these levels and no assessment guidelines are available to providers. As Levels 1 and 2 constitute 20% of the qualifications framework launched in 2003 this undoubtedly a matter warranting serious attention. However, a total of 50 learners at Levels 5 and 6, achieved twenty-eight minor and twenty-two major awards[14]. There is a need for workable, transparent and efficient structures of assessment.

RPL would seem to be extremely demanding for a variety of reasons. In particular, the provider would have to prepare a detailed checklist for each award before even beginning the process but of course each provider would do a different checklist. Therefore there would be little or no consistency. A suggestion for addressing this is that the Standards Development Group (SDG) that draws up the Award Specification would also draw up this checklist which inform both the RPL and programme development process and of course the teachers who deliver the programme.

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[14] Recognition of Prior Learning Evaluation Report (2007) Dublin: FETAC.

Significance of Key Concepts in LLL Policy

This section explains and accounts for the importance of the following concepts in LLL policy and practice in Ireland: Learning citizens, Knowledge society, Learning cities/regions and Learning organisations.

Learning Citizens:

While the concept of learning citizen is not directly employed within an Irish context, nonetheless, for a number of lifelong learning initiatives across the state, the notion of 'a learning citizen' is espoused as central to their objectives. One such example is that of the University College Dublin Outreach Partnership Programme which has a commitment to providing opportunities for lifelong learning through focusing on knowledge, education and training and providing flexible methods of course delivery with the goal of facilitating citizens to update their knowledge and skills.

Knowledge Society:

The Irish Government established the second Information Society Commission (ISC), for the period 2001-2004, as an independent advisory body to Government. The Commission included representation from the business community, the social partners and the Government. The role of the ISC was envisaged as shaping the evolving public policy framework for the information society in Ireland.

The Commission produced a number of interim reports including *'Building the Knowledge Society'* (December, 2002) in which they identified Ireland's relative strengths and weaknesses in addressing the challenges of the emerging knowledge or 'information' society, with its final report entitled, *'Learning to Innovate: Reperceiving the global information society'* (January, 2005).

Arising from the recommendations of the Report pertaining particularly to e-Accessibility, specific funding was made available to drive e-inclusion through the promotion of greater engagement with ICT among individuals/groups from socio-economically disadvantaged and marginalized backgrounds.
Key to the development of the knowledge society in an Irish context was the establishment in 2001 of the

National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI). Since its establishment, a single unified framework of qualifications has been developed through the work of the NQAI, along with the creation of both the Further and Higher Education and Training Awards Councils (FETAC and HETAC respectively). These bodies now provide a single structure (funded through the DES) for the accreditation of all non-university education and training at further and higher levels in Ireland.
In relation to university-based higher education, the HEA is the statutory planning and development body for higher education and research in Ireland. The principal functions of the HEA include:

- To maintain a continuous review of the demand and need for higher education.
- To promote the attainment of equality of opportunity in higher education and democratisation of higher education.

Learning Cities/Regions:

The concept of the Learning Region is still relatively new to Ireland. In 2004 the University of Limerick with the theme of 'Developing the Learning Region' hosted the European Universities Continuing Education Network (EUCEN) Conference.

Ireland has a number of initiatives listed on the virtual community website of the R3L Network (The European Networks to Promote the Local and Regional Dimension of Lifelong Learning Initiative). The R3L Project is a new initiative of the European Commission to promote "Regional Networks in Lifelong Learning".

In relation to education generally, the Department of Education and Science has established ten regional offices for the information and advice on the education services available on a local/regional basis. The National Forum Action Plan on Ending Educational Disadvantage (2003) recommended the establishment of regional educational structures with real decision-making powers to ensure local accountability and a community-approach to decision-making. This recommendation highlighted the Forum's concern that "the centralised nature of decision-making which exists within the education system at present simply does not work and does not meet the needs of the State's

children experiencing educational inequality". Coordinated by the Educational Disadvantage Centre, the Partnership in Action Group (2005) established to implement the Forum Action Plan, made the establishment of genuine regional educational structures one of its three priority recommendations. In contrast to current regional educational structures which do not have devolved budgets nor decision-making powers, the Action Plan envisages that genuine regional educational structures would be able to make decisions around the analysis of regional needs, the development of strategies for the integration of services at a local level and the allocation of funding and resources. The HEA (2005, p27) report recommends that 'A model for a regionally-based service should be developed to ensure that all students enrolling in higher or further education have access to a needs assessment service'.

Learning Organisations:

There are a number of key learning organisations and organisations which co-ordinate initiatives across the adult education/lifelong learning sector in Ireland.

- FÁS is Ireland's national training and employment authority. They aim to promote a more competitive and inclusive knowledge-based economy, in collaboration with their stakeholders, by enhancing the skills and capabilities of individuals and enterprises.
- The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) is a membership organisation with voluntary status concerned with national co-ordination, training and policy development in adult literacy work in Ireland.
- AONTAS is the Irish National Association of Adult Education, a voluntary membership organisation. It exists to promote the development of a learning society through the provision of a quality and comprehensive system of adult learning and education, which is accessible to and inclusive of all. Through its members, self-development is at the core of its community education provision taking ethnic communities into specific account. By its nature AONTAS is an outreach organisation. Community ownership is key to the members of AONTAS especially in the area of community education.

Legislation and Policy

Key Legislative Developments

The OECD Report (2004) notes that Ireland has an impressive legislative framework for dealing with adult education and lifelong education. The 1997 Universities Act identified a role for the universities in promoting lifelong learning through the provision of adult and continuing education. In 2000, the Government issued a White Paper *Learning for Life* and this was followed by the Qualification (Education and Training) Act in 1999 and the National Training Fund Act. The National Adult Learning Council was established in 2002, later suspended in 2003 and the National Qualifications Framework in 2003. Nevertheless, the Statutory Committee on Educational Disadvantage (2005) notes that 'Ireland lags behind other industrialised countries in having no legislative basis for paid educational leave to enable people to gain qualifications later in life, having been educationally disadvantaged in their earlier years'(p20)

Some of the key legislative provisions in relation to lifelong learning are as follows:

The Universities Act (1997)
- Section 9 (j) of which states that one of the objectives is to 'facilitate lifelong learning through the provision of adult and continuing education'

The Education Act (1998)
- Promotes equality of access
- Promotes opportunities for adults especially those who did not avail of or benefit from education in school.

The National Qualifications (Education and Training Act) (1999)
- Established an administrative structure for the development, recognition and awarding of education and training qualifications in the state and the definition of their functions

The Education Welfare Act (2000)
- The Education Welfare Act (Ireland) 2000 sets compulsory school attendance age in Ireland at 16 years, or completion of lower second-level education, whichever is the later. Thus, post-compulsory education in Ireland commences on or after the individual reaching the age of 16 or having completed the Junior Certificate Examinations (Equivalent of Level 2 International Standard Classification of Education/ISCED1997).

Key policy developments include:

- **Green Paper - *Adult Education in an Era of Learning* (1998)**

The Department's Green Paper Adult Education in an Era of Life Long Learning (1998) argues that the key elements of the concept of lifelong learning are "providing learning opportunities over a life span rather than only in the early years, widening recognition to embrace new forms of learning [and] recognising that learning takes place in a range of settings wider than schools and colleges" (p2).

Objectives of the Green Paper include: establishing the basis for a national policy on Adult Education and to identify priority areas, the proposal of mechanisms for the co-ordination of this sector within an holistic and inclusive system of education and within an overall national policy commitment to lifelong learning.

- **White Paper on Adult Learning – *'Learning for Life'* (2000)**

Building on from the Green Paper, this key policy document reflects critically on the role of adult education and lifelong learning in Irish society while setting out the Irish Government's policies and priorities for the future development of this education sector. Indeed as stated earlier in the report, the White Paper represents the most significant policy development in adult education/lifelong learning, to date, in Ireland.

- **National Development Plan NDP (2000-2006)**

Following through from these policy documents, the National Development Plan set as a priority the "continued investment in education and training and, in particular, through developing a strategic vision for lifelong learning" (National Development Plan 2000-2006, para. 5.21). In the light of this, investment in education under the Plan was to concentrate on:

- Prevention of early school leaving;
- Increasing the retention rate at second level;
- Expanding adult and second chance education and training opportunities;
- Widening access to third level education;
- Improving the funding situation for Research, Technological Development and Innovation (RTDI) – in 2000 it was the lowest in Europe.
- Establishment and continuous development of a coherent National Qualifications Framework which underpins a strategy of lifelong learning;
- Supporting the requirements of the labour market.

Social partnership agreements entered into by the Government over this time period – i.e. the *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness* (PPF) (2000-2002) and *Sustaining Progress* (2003-2005) (more particularly the former) explicitly referred to Lifelong Learning:

i)   The PPF acknowledged lifelong learning as the key to a future of sustained economic growth and social development at a time of ongoing change and called for the development of a strategic framework for lifelong learning including the establishment of a Taskforce on Lifelong Learning.

ii) *Sustaining Progress* specifically referred to '…still maintaining the promoting and investing in Lifelong Learning within available resources' (p42). Work on implementing the recommendations of the Task Force on Lifelong Learning was to be progressed as a strategic priority as resources permit.

iii) Provision in the form of significant funding was to be made available for the rapid expansion of adult literacy services.

iv) Targets were set for increasing the mature student intake from 2000-2005 and from 2006-2015.

- Report on the Taskforce on Lifelong Learning (2002)

The Taskforce set out to develop a Strategic Framework of Lifelong Learning by mapping existing provisions, identifying gaps in those provisions and proposing solutions to fill those gaps. The establishment of the Taskforce derives from commitments in the PPF.

- Report in Adult Literacy – Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education and Science (2006)

The Committee's Report makes 28 recommendations across a range of key areas in adult literacy, including planning, structures and organisation, staffing, literacy initiatives and supporting access to literacy services. The Report calls for further developments particularly in relation to English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) services, workplace literacy programmes, family literacy programmes and the development of a literacy strategy specifically for the Travelling community.

Tomorrow's Skills: Towards a National Skills Strategy.(2007)

An Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN) have published this strategy document which identifies Ireland's current skills profile and provides a strategic overview and specific objectives for Ireland's future skills requirements. The key objective of the strategy is cited as being 'to identify the skills required for Ireland to make the transition to a competitive, innovation-driven, knowledge-based, participative and inclusive economy by 2020' (p4). The strategy sets a range of targets to be achieved within the timeframe set out including:

- An additional 500,000 individuals within the workforce to be up-skilled and to progress by at least one National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) level over and above their current level of education and training;
- The Leaving Certificate retention rate for young people should rise to 90 percent;
- By 2020, the proportion of the population aged 20-24 with NFQ level 4 or 5 qualification (Leaving Certificate or equivalent), should be increased to 93 percent.
- The progression from second- to third-level education should increase from 55 percent to 72 percent;
- The integration of immigrants into the education and training system, at all levels.
- Career guidance and mentoring for those at work.
- Assistance for individuals and companies in identifying their skills needs.
- More awareness programmes that highlight the benefits of education / training.
- The need for education / training provision to be flexible and responsive to the felt needs of employers and employees.
- *Towards 2016* Ten Year Framework Social Partnership Agreement 2006-2015

The Government's commitment to Lifelong Learning is summarised thus: '…drive the lifelong learning agenda by enhancing access to training, the development of new skills, the acquisition of recognised qualifications and progression to higher-level qualifications…' (p31). The National Reform Programme highlights key priorities in the context of ensuring an integrated approach to addressing skills needs across the education and training sector, addressing barriers to access and progression, the issue of life-long learning and tackling early school leaving and literacy and numeracy issues. Some of the high level outcomes to be achieved within the ten-year framework will include:

— The substantial reduction in literacy/numeracy problems among children, particularly in schools serving disadvantaged communities and the adult population;
— A strengthening of the technical and vocational dimensions of curricula and to embed key skills such as learning to learn and Information and Communications Technology (ICT);
— The development of higher order thinking skills and the diversification and strengthening of language learning;
— The modernisation of the technology subjects with a view to increase the take up of the physical sciences at senior level;
— Driving the lifelong learning agenda by enhancing access to training, the development of new skills, the acquisition of recognised qualifications and progression to higher-level qualifications;
— The further development of second-chance educational measures for vulnerable groups.

• National Development Plan NDP (2007-2013) *Transforming Ireland- A Better Quality of Life for All*

In the current National Development Plan, the Government is committed to the implementation of a Lifelong Learning policy and to the modernization of the workplace. Under *Towards 2016*, it was agreed that one of the high level objectives to be reached is to drive the lifelong learning agenda by enhancing access to training, the development of new skills, the acquisition of recognised qualifications and progression to higher level qualifications. Linked to the National Skills Strategy targets as set out above, over €2.8 billion is to be invested in training and skills development programmes, including employment training, apprenticeships, new skills training for adult workers and programmes for school leavers. Nearly €5 billion is to be provided for training and development programmes for a wide range of groups, including lone parents, people with disabilities, Travellers, ex-offenders and other categories requiring special interventions (this will also support the goals in the social inclusion priority) and €13 billion for Third-Level Infrastructure and for ongoing costs of the sector in the context of the promotion of strategic and structural development.

Investment under the Human Capital Priority of NDP 2007-2013 is indicatively estimated at €25.8 billion (NDP 2007). Lifelong Learning is the guiding principle for education and training policy in the context of the Lisbon Agenda. One of the major outputs under this Priority will be to expand the workforce through the activation of groups such as the unemployed, people with disabilities, ex-offenders, women, older people, Travellers and lone parents, as well as the implementation of an appropriate skills based migration policy. This level of investment, thus, has clear significance for lifelong learning in Ireland and particularly for individuals with low/no qualifications which represents circa one-third of the workforce in both national and European contexts (EU Communication on Adult Learning (October, 2006).

Main Patterns of Provision and Participation

Participation

Key summary data relating to participation in formal and informal education in Ireland is presented in Tables 1 to 3 below. This data has been sourced from the Central Statistics Office Module on Life Long Learning Second Quarter 2003 (CSO, 2004).[15]

Table 1: Rates of Participation in Formal and Informal Education by Highest Educational Level Attained

	Formal	Non-Formal
No formal education / primary	1.0	7.1
Lower secondary	3.7	15.2
Higher secondary	7.2	18.2
Post Leaving Certificate	6.0	22.5
Third Level Non-Degree	11.0	32.0
Third Level Degree or above	11.2	35.3

Table 2: Rates of Participation in Formal and Informal Education by Occupational Group

	Formal	Non-Formal
Managers and administrators	5.0	17.2
Professional	13.3	31.9
Associate professional and technical	12.7	27.5
Clerical and secretarial	7.9	18.4
Craft and related	14.6	13.9
Personal and protective	8.5	17.9
Sales	5.4	12.2
Machine and plant operatives	2.5	10.8
Other	4.2	10.7

Table 3: Rates of Participation in Formal and Informal Education by Economic Sector

	Formal	Non-Formal
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	2.1	9.4
Other production industries	7.2	15.4
Construction	12.9	14.4
Wholesale and retail	5.6	12.7
Hotels and restaurants	5.9	12.0
Transport, storage and communications	4.7	14.3
Financial and other business services	10.2	22.4
Public administration and defence	9.5	26.8
Education	12.2	33.0
Health	12.0	26.5
Other Services	9.3	17.8

[15] In reading and interpreting the tables it is important to note that the rate of participation is based on the number stating they received formal or non-formal education in the past 12 months divided by relevant population figure i.e. all those who responded to the question.

Provision

Adult literacy services are provided through the VECs, which employ Adult Literacy Organisers and staff, funded through the Department's Adult Literacy and Community Education (ALCE) budget. At the time of the publication of the 1997 OECD survey, the budget was €1m for the entire country, some 5,000 learners were benefiting from the service[16] and unpaid volunteers gave 85% of all tuition. The VECs currently deliver adult literacy courses to approximately 35,000 participants annually. In line with the commitment under the Ten Year Framework Social Partnership, *Towards 2016* there will be an increase of 7,000 places over the period of the NDP (NDP 2007-2013, p250).

Participation in VTOS (Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme) has largely remained stable; in 1996 there were 5,000 students registered, 5,489 students in the year 2000/2001 with 5,708 registered in 2001/2002. In December 2005, there were 5,538 students participating in VTOS[17]. The Scheme is funded by the Department of Education and Science and delivered locally by the Vocational Educational Committees. There are 99 centres nationwide catering for some 5,000 participants, 68% female and 32% male. Courses are held in VEC premises, adult education centres and rented premises. Courses are provided free of charge, and meal and travel allowances may be provided. Childcare and guidance supports are available. Courses are full-time and can last for up to two years, with 30 hours attendance per week. Trainees on VTOS can pursue subjects in the Junior or Leaving Certificate programmes or modules or awards certified by the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) at various levels. Currently 1,500 of the 5,000 students are presenting at FETAC levels 5 and 6. The remainder are presenting at FETAC levels 3 and 4 or equivalent.

People aged 21 or over, and in receipt of Jobseekers Benefit or Assistance (previously known as Unemployment Benefit/Assistance), One-Parent Family Payment, Disability Allowance, Disability Benefit or Invalidity Pension for at least six months are eligible for VTOS. People signing for credits who satisfy these conditions and dependant spouses of eligible persons may avail of the programme and receive a payment from the VEC in lieu of their welfare payment,

equivalent to the maximum rate of unemployment benefit. In the remaining cases, persons attending full-time retain their welfare payment. In order to attract longer-term unemployed people, a bonus of €31.80 per week is payable to participants who have been in receipt of an eligible social welfare payment for at least one year directly prior to starting VTOS (NDP 2007-2013, p249).

Most recent figures show *Youthreach* having 3,292 students registered in July 2007 with 1,084 students registered in the Senior Traveller Training Centres at December 2006 (DES). Some €574 million will be available over the period of the Plan for the Youthreach Sub-Programme. The Youthreach Sub-Programme will involve, as in previous NDPs, training, education, further education/early adult education for those who are alienated from the formal system, i.e. economically disadvantaged, socially vulnerable and frequently challenging youth. Its overarching objective will be to help participants to achieve independence, sustainability and employability, to build self-esteem and communications skills and to become active citizens and lifelong learners. Particular attention will be given to addressing the special needs of the young people participating in the Sub-Programme. Future developments in Youthreach programmes will be informed by the evaluation being carried out by the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Science and also by the findings of the expenditure review of Youthreach and Senior Traveller Training Centres (NDP 2007-2013, p246).

The National Training and Employment Authority, FÁS anticipates the needs of, and responds to, a constantly changing labour market which employs over 2 million people. Through a regional network of 66 offices and 20 training centres, FÁS operates training and employment programmes, provides a recruitment service to jobseekers and employers, an advisory service for industry and supports community-based enterprises. The statistics given in the FÁS 2005 Annual Report show that there were 43,231 people engaged in education and training throughout the country (FÁS).

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[16] www.un.org
[17] See also Keogh & Downes (1998) for VTOS participants' accounts of their experiences on the scheme

Patterns of Participation Regarding Literacy

Adult literacy is the Government's top priority in adult education. Literacy is fundamental to empowerment and personal development. It is an attempt to give a second chance to people for whom the mainstream system did not properly cater when they were younger. Funding will be available to provide access to literacy, numeracy and basic education to those adults whose skills are deficient in these areas. Adult literacy courses are delivered through the VECs by nearly 4,000 volunteers and 1,500 paid practitioners and the service is free of charge to the students. The VECs currently deliver adult literacy courses to approximately 35,000 participants annually. In line with the commitment under *Towards 2016* there will be an increase of 7,000 places over the period of the NDP. (NDP 2007-2013, p249-50)

Under the National Adult Literacy Strategy, adults typically receive 2 hours literacy tuition per week over 30 weeks per year (averaging 60 hours tuition). A DES funded adult literacy programme Intensive Tuition in Adult Basic Education (ITABE) (a joint project between the VECs and NALA) provides participants, in groups of 6 – 8 students, with 6 hours of tuition per week over a 14-week period – involving an introduction to Information Technology and learning how to learn as well as basic literacy and numeracy. Participants must be experiencing a severe degree of literacy or numeracy difficulties and have a literacy standard below FETAC Level 3. They also have the option of FETAC accreditation (NALA).

While the ITABE programme offers an advancement in terms of intensity of literacy programmes on offer, nevertheless, international research and experience suggests that 'between 550-600 hours of instruction are needed to become fully literate and numerate' (Moser Report, 1999, p31). Report,

Figures from the Department of Education and Science VEC adult literacy returns for 2006 indicate participation of 12,133 ESOL learners in adult literacy, amounting to 30% of total participants.

Both radio and TV adult literacy and awareness programmes have been commissioned and broadcast by RTE, with the series READ WRITE NOW commissioned in 2001 and broadcast each year attracting an average weekly audience of 235,000. A free-phone help line manned by trained tutors and free learner support materials supplement this TV programme. Videos of the series have been distributed to literacy schemes, *Youthreach*/Traveller and VTOS centres, public libraries and video outlets.

Workplace basic education is an expanding area of provision. A joint FÁS/VEC Return to Learning Programme that combined work experience within the Community Employment Scheme with intensive literacy tuition is also being expanded nationally. Furthermore, a workplace literacy programme has been piloted successfully and is being extended to all local authority areas, in co-operation with LANPAG (the Local Authority National Partnership Board).

The expansion of workplace literacy initiatives in collaboration with industry is also envisaged. The concern expressed by some organisations is that workplace education is overly economically driven.

The SkillVEC project is another recent example, where the City of Dublin VEC is leading a project to deliver workplace education and training to Health Service Executive (HSE) staff on a country-wide basis.

A workplace literacy group with the key social partners and education and training agencies has recommended the establishment of a Workplace Basic Education Fund (WBEF). This fund has subsequently been established through FÁS, and rolled out under the *Skills for Work* initiative and operating under the *One Step Up* umbrella of FÁS services. Figures to date indicate that this programme provided for 1,618 workers in companies throughout Ireland in 2006.

Access to Higher Education

The Combat Poverty Agency's submission to the OECD in 2004 states that 'Despite the large increase in the numbers attending third level, there are still a number of socio-economic groups that are substantially under-represented. The Report of the Higher Education Authority (HEA) Action Group on access to third-level

education (Osborne and Leith, 2000) determined that two out of the six socio-economic groups were particularly under-represented in Irish higher education, namely the unskilled/agriculture workers and unskilled social class groups. The report recommended specific targets for participation for each of these groups up to 2006. While almost all social groups have experienced increases in participation since 1980, the greatest beneficiaries of the expansion of third-level opportunities have been 'Higher Professionals', 'Employers and Managers' and 'Farmers' who recorded the greatest improvement in participation between 1980 and 1998. Conversely, the lower socio-economic groups remain disproportionately under-represented in third-level education' (p3-4).

Combat Poverty highlights that 'Data indicate that there has been little or no improvement in the proportion of third-level entrants from the lower socio-economic groups over the period 1991 to 2001. In fact, this data suggests that 'Unskilled Manual Workers' constituted a smaller proportion of entrants in 2001 than they did in 1991. Within the university sector, the lower socio-economic groups represented an even smaller proportion of entrants in 2001 than they did in 1995'(p4).

Their submission to the OECD concludes that 'Lower socio-economic groups' persistent under-representation in higher education is, in many ways, a product of the high levels of attrition and [alienation] of many among these groups in second level education. However, even those who achieve a minimum threshold in the Leaving Certificate examination remain substantially less likely to transfer to higher education than their peers from higher socio-economic groups. For less well-off groups, economic considerations, especially the short-term opportunity costs of staying in education and not entering employment, become very significant at the point of transfer to higher education. This raises serious questions about the adequacy of the maintenance grant for those coming from low-income households' (p4).[18]

The Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) was introduced in 1990 and is managed and allocated by the Department of Social and Family Affairs (DSFA).[19] It is an important source of support for progression to

full-time further or higher education for particular groups of students. Unemployed persons, single parents or people with disabilities, aged 21 or over, who have been in receipt of social welfare payments for twelve months or more can apply for funding which is not means-tested and is not affected by maintenance grant payments (HEA 2005).

The HEA report (2004, p28) notes that: 'Access must become an integral part of an institutions' policy and practical agenda. It must be an explicit element in each institution's strategic plan with targets and indicators to measure progress'.

Under the social inclusion measures in the NDP, there is provision for a Third Level Access Fund totalling €120m over the period 2000 to 2006, aimed at tackling under-representation by three target groups: -

- Students from disadvantaged backgrounds
- Mature students
- Students with disabilities

(DES)

In addition the following major reports, among others, have been published by the National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education: *Access and Equity in Higher Education: An International Perspective* (2000), *The Report of the Action Group on Access to Third Level Education* (2001), *Supporting Equity in Higher Education* (2003), *Achieving Equity of Access to Higher Education – Setting an Agenda for Action in Ireland* (2004), *Achieving Equity of Access to Higher Education in Ireland – Action Plan 2005-2007.*

Patterns of Participation By Age

Inadequate efforts have been made to address the learning needs of older population groups. For example, in the UK 27% of full-time students entering higher education are over the age of 23, whereas in Ireland the equivalent figure in 2005 is circa 10%. The OECD average is just under 20%. Data from the DES indicate that while in the last decade participation in full-time courses by mature students has doubled, it still represents only 10% of the student population at third level institutions of education. The Irish higher education sector, thus, would appear to be very much

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[18] CPA (2004) Combat Poverty Agency (2004) Submission to the OECD on its review of higher education in Ireland. Dublin: CPA.
[19] The 'Third Level Allowance' (TLA) was introduced in 1990 and, following expansion to include second level and further education studies, was renamed the Back to Education Allowance in 1998.

the preserve of the young, predominantly Leaving Certificate qualified entrant. This does not reflect the experience of some other OECD countries, such as Sweden, where up to 38% of higher education entrants are over 25 years of age. The national target as set out by the National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education is to see combined full-time and part-time participation of at least 30% mature students.

Patterns of Participation By Gender

Adult education and lifelong learning has traditionally been driven by a dynamic community-based women's education sector. A Women's Education Initiative was established in 1998 with assistance under the 1994 – 1999 Community Support Framework (CSF) to assist projects to address the current gaps in provision for women experiencing educational disadvantage. In the 2000 – 2006 Operational Programme this measure has been broadened into an Education Equality Initiative focussing on both disadvantaged women and men, in view of the under-representation of men in adult education generally, and the particular difficulties experienced in attracting disadvantaged older men. The very low participation of men in adult and community education is a big challenge for VECs and the DES. The Green Paper notes that 80% of community education participants are women and there is now recognition of the need for distinct outreach strategies to motivate men to participate in adult education (Owens 2000).

Patterns of Participation through Information and Communications Technology (ICT)/ Distance Learning

Although the 2000 White Paper addressed Distance Learning and accepted that there was a "robust demand"[20] for this form of educational participation there has been little expansion in this area. Distance Learning is provided by, among others, Dublin City University with the OSCAIL programme, National University of Ireland (NUI) Galway's Adult & Continuing Education Programmes Distance Learning, the National College of Ireland and the Open University. The NUI BSc degree in Rural Development by Distance Learning is a unique collaborative venture between the four constituent NUI Universities: Cork, Dublin, Galway, and Maynooth. This Degree is the first

mature student access qualification that recognises and extends the professional qualification pathway for adults active in the development of rural areas. It will provide participants with the knowledge and skills necessary to initiate and manage local rural development. This programme is the first third level qualification to extensively use information technology in distance learning to enable a mature student to qualify with a diploma after two years part time study, and to continue to earn a degree after a further two years (NUIM). A further innovation is the FÁS e College which provides online learning courses. There is a wide range of interactive courses available around the clock. Most of the courses have Industry Certification. There are private colleges also providing distance learning but with varying standards. With this in mind it is believed to be imperative that the scope for distance learning provision be used to full advantage but nonetheless, there has been little push in the provision of Distance Learning.

Launched in 1999 on the part of the DES, *IT 2000* was a major investment programme to provide funding for software, hardware and computerised school administration. In addition, the Teaching Skills Initiative (TSI) provides ICT training for teachers. Approximately 50,000 training places have been provided. The overall aim of TSI is to allow teachers to develop a skills/training continuum, which will allow them to progress in a structured way from novice to expert-user of ICTs.

Patterns of Participation by Ethnicity and Nationality

According to the State census (2002), 18% of Irish male Travellers and 20.5% of Irish female Travellers aged 15 years or over were still involved in education in 2002. 39.7% of Irish Travellers aged 15 years and over left school under 15 years of age and in 2007, there were 1,084 funded places in Senior Traveller Training Centres.

With regard to refugees and asylum seekers, the White Paper states that refugees are entitled to the same access to education and training as Irish nationals. Arrangements have been introduced in primary and secondary levels to provide additional teaching resources for the increasing numbers of children for

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[20] A growth of 198% in under-graduate student enrolment in the National Distance Education Centre, DCU in the nine years from 1988 to 1997 (White Paper, 2000)

whom English is not their first language. With regard to adults, a Refugee Language Support Unit has been established in Trinity College Dublin (TCD) to co-ordinate language assessment and tuition on a national basis.

There is some evidence that immigrants in Ireland are under-employed (Barrett and Bergin, 2007). Barrett and McCarthy (IZA, 2006) suggest this occupational gap may be related to English language competency. In this regard, figures indicated that there is, currently, significant participation by migrant workers and asylum seekers in the adult literacy services. However, there remains an urgent need for a clear policy on ESOL and English services to meet the needs of migrant workers as well as asylum seekers and refugees, especially those with less than Level 4 qualifications. In the absence of such a policy, the responsibility for providing services to asylum seekers (White Paper, 2000) has been extended in practice by providers to include other ESOL learners, such as migrant workers. The entire increase in participation in adult literacy between 2002 and 2005 is attributed to ESOL learners, mainly migrant workers. As stated above, ESOL learners currently make up 30% of adult literacy participants and VTOS now has 20% foreign national participants.

The need for a State strategy to integrate the lifelong learning needs of ethnic minority parents with the educational needs of their children has been emphasised in the context of Blanchardstown, Dublin (Downes, Maunsell & Ivers 2006). This would include provision of accredited community leadership training for representatives from local ethnic minority groups.

Participation and Disability

The HEA (2004) report observes that 'Additional learning support is offered to students with a disability in the majority of [third level] institutions. In University College Dublin (UCD), a comprehensive screening, referral and support service has been developed for students with dyslexia, physical, sensory or psychological disabilities'. The report notes that: 'To cater for growing numbers of students with dyslexia and other learning disabilities, several universities employ a learning support tutor' (p10).

People with disabilities are not a homogenous group, and they have many diverse experiences around education, including issues such as difficulties physically picking up a book and turning its pages, lack of confidence in academic ability, varied backgrounds in special or mainstream education, lifelong or acquired disability etc. Much of the energy in terms of endeavours to include those with disabilities tends to focus on intellectual disabilities, but people with other disabilities (e.g. physical disabilities, acquired brain injuries etc) have very different needs and face very different barriers. This needs to be acknowledged in the formulation of any policy of inclusion.

Women with disabilities who have young children often face unique barriers in accessing child-care, such as accessibility of child-care facilities for wheelchair users and difficulties with transport (O'Connor, Barry and Murphy 2006). One of the greatest barriers to people with disabilities in accessing the community generally and education specifically is the lack of good quality, reliable, accessible transport. Many areas, especially rural areas do not have systems of accessible public transport.

A number of funding sources exist to support people with disabilities to access adult education, including grants for adaptation of premises, and funding for assistance with personal care needs, the purchase of Assistive Technology (AT), and transport etc, but the majority of these funding sources require a person to be a full-time student for eligibility. The vast majority of people with disabilities accessing education do so on a part-time basis due to the impact of their impairment, and funding needs to be re-structured as a matter of urgency to reflect this. It is also vital that state disability benefits are not affected by receipt of such funding, in order to avoid barriers to inclusion through a 'benefits-trap' system.

Assistive Technology can be a vital tool for people with disabilities to access and actively engage in education. Adult education facilities should invest in some basic AT equipment, such as literacy-support software for those with learning difficulties, and alternative computer access methods (adapted key-boards and mice, switch access etc) for people with physical disabilities. In particular, screen-readers can be invaluable to those who have experienced CVA (cardio-

vascular accident / stroke), those with acquired brain injuries effecting literacy skills and the visually impaired. Some funding is available for such devices through the 'Minister's Fund', but again this is only available for full-time students, and a funding source is required for educational facilities to purchase a bank of appropriate AT devices.

Adult Education in Irish Prisons

O'Mahony's (1997) survey of male prisoners in Mountjoy indicated that over half came from six socio-economically disadvantaged areas in Dublin and that education experience and success among prisoners was 'very limited' (p.53). The results of the Prison Adult Literacy Survey (Morgan & Kett 2003) show that one-fifth of prisoners scored at pre-level one, which is so low as to be similar to what was traditionally regarded as 'illiterate'. More than half the prison sample was located in level one and pre-level one, a stage created for this survey to represent the extremely low levels of literacy. According to the Council of Europe, education and training in prison can redress the high level of educational disadvantage experienced by the majority of prisoners, counteract the detrimental effects of prison and has the capacity to help those who want to turn away from crime (Council of Europe 1990).

The Visiting Committee Reports for Mountjoy and Cloverhill prisons for 2005-2006 express concern about their inability to access prisoners concerns (2006, p5; 2006, p13). Justice Dermot Kinlen's (2006, p12) evaluation report of all prisons in Ireland stated as follows:

> ...and most importantly (and most neglected is rehabilitation). I have highlighted in my reports how in Cork, for example, only fifty per cent of prisoners have any occupation. In St. Patrick's Institution which I

remember in 1970 had eighteen workshops now has none!

Oates (2007) notes that adult education in prison is discussed in the NDP 2007-2013 though 'it is not seen as a priority' (p.27). She contrasts this with the Council of Europe Report (1990, p.14) which emphasised that 'the education of prisoners must, in its philosophy, methods and content be brought as close as possible to the best adult education in the society outside; secondly, education should be constantly seeking ways to link prisoners with the outside community and to enable both groups to interact with each other as fully and as constructively as possible'. Moreover, a Department of Justice Report (2002) concluded that currently the prison system does not have the resources or facilities to provide for the specialised needs of prisoners with special educational needs.

A number of internal barriers to education within prison have recently been highlighted. Oates' (2007, p89) six Mountjoy interviewees stated that 'landings being locked' created a difficulty in attending education in prison as those 'who wish to attend the school may be left at a gate waiting for long periods of time and often never access the school'. Others she interviewed spoke of their time in Cloverhill and stated that it does not have any education provision even though it has an education unit (p.89). In Oates (2007) three interviewees told stories of preparing to sit an examination and then suddenly they were transferred or released. She highlights (p.95) the role of time as a barrier to educational participation in prison and notes the suggestions of prisoners that the short opening hours of the school and the many holidays taken by teachers could be counteracted by evening classes and weekend classes.

Broader Social Policy and Lifelong Learning

The Irish Statutory Committee on Educational Disadvantage (2005) 'proposes a new strategy that places the solutions to educational disadvantage within an inclusive lifelong learning framework' (p4) and recognise that 'the adult and community education sector has been very active in pushing the boundaries and in promoting systemic change' (p17). A good practice example of community development policy is An Cosán in Tallaght, Dublin involving, in the main, women centred in the community of Tallaght West, in the top 1% of most disadvantaged areas in Ireland. The vast majority are lone parents and social welfare recipients, including some asylum seekers. Most left the formal educational system at a very young age, some not even reaching secondary school. There are 450 participants in 23 classes (average size 15 in a class) per year. The learners and the tutors create learner-centred curricula, with even the accredited programmes being learner centred. A full counselling service is provided with approximately 35% of the course participants having also accessed the counselling dimension. They work closely with local drug projects and work with methadone users (age 17-25) in providing personal development and education. Their starting point is courses on Personal Development and Communication Skills, Basic Literacy and Numeracy Training. These courses allow participants, the majority of whom left school at 14/15 years, to proceed in a carefully planned progression route to mainstream education, training or employment. A second group of courses reflect the needs of the local community for training in leadership, e.g., training for community drug workers and estate management courses. These courses have been developed at the request of local community groups. These courses allow a process of empowerment, people are encouraged to access and voice their own education and training needs thereby supporting people to take control of their own lives as individuals and communities. The third series of courses they run allows people to access further education. Some of their past students have gone on to third level Colleges and Universities, gaining certificates, diplomas and degrees. The fourth strand of courses has, as its immediate goal, retraining for employment. Their state of the art computer centre will allow further courses to up skill long term unemployed people for employment. Their proximity to City West Business Campus, which will employ 12,000 people, allows them ready access to a potential job market.

Gender

The Gender Equality Unit was established in June 2001 under the Equal Opportunities Promotion and Monitoring measure of the NDP 2001-2006. The Equality Unit is currently establishing its strategy, which includes creating awareness of gender equality among all the stakeholders in the education system, including the staff of the DES. It provides a support and advisory service on mainstreaming equality between women and men – (gender mainstreaming). They believe that equality of opportunity between women and men, between girls and boys, now affects the lives of every person who comes into contact with the education system.

Central to women's learning opportunities/participation in lifelong learning is the issue of childcare (cf. Childcare and Adult Education, AONTAS, 2003). AONTAS have highlighted flexible needs-based childcare support for adult learners as key to participation though there is a growing difficulty with the cost of insurance, access to appropriate premises/facilities and availability of trained childcare personnel.

The Women's Education Network states that 'Locally based education groups through providing safe and accessible childcare attracted many women who could not otherwise participate in education' (1998-2000, p4), and AONTAS recommends that adequate, affordable and accessible childcare should be an integral part of funded programmes and not an add-on or an afterthought (AONTAS, 2003, p4).
Owens (2000) observes that some men's groups serve as a 'gateway to education' through linking men to relevant programmes and supporting them through the process rather than offering education in its own right. To engage marginalized men, Owens (2000) emphasises the importance of counsellors to provide emotional support for participants and identifies programme participants as a key resource to motivate other more marginalised people to participate in adult education

Ethnicity and Nationality

The Refugee Language Support Unit was established in Trinity College Dublin in 1999, which has completed benchmarks for English Language proficiency for school going and asylum seeking children. All adult refugees

presenting for English language tuition are assessed and assigned to appropriate classes. A register of English language tuition providers is maintained. The pilot phase of the Refugee Language Support Unit has been successfully completed and has been replaced on a more permanent basis by an organisation called Integrate Ireland language and Training Ltd. This Unit operates on behalf of the DES under the aegis of TCD. It will continue the work of the pilot unit. It is also providing training on an on-going basis for teachers involved with international pupils as well as delivering English language teaching to adult refugees, developing further teaching materials and carrying out research.

There remains, however, a need for a clear policy on ESOL and English services to meet the needs of asylum seekers and refugees and migrant workers, particularly those with low/no qualifications.

Senior Traveller Training Centres (STTC) provides a basic compensatory education for Travellers from 15 upward in their 33 centres nationwide. They aim to provide Travellers with the knowledge, skills and attitudes required to make the transition to work and adult life and to participate successfully in their communities.

Traveller girls tend to marry at a very young age; Forkan (2005) notes that 'many girls would be interested in returning to education...post marriage' for 'topics as literacy, arts and craft, Junior Cert and childcare courses'. He also notes the increased number of Traveller grandmothers taking adult education classes and recommends need for schools to try and implement an integrated system for working with Traveller parents as the provision of literacy classes or general adult education classes would further help Traveller parents to help their own children's education. Other key issues to engage Travellers include the need for promotion of role models by local support agencies for other Travellers, the need for supports to foster positive relations with teachers at second level (Clarke 2007) and the need to meet transport costs to enable those to attend classes.

Age

U3A, the University of the 3rd Age, is a co-operative learning model for older people. It began in France in the 1970s and has spread worldwide. The word 'university' in this context comes from medieval times meaning a gathering or co-operative. Members design their own programme of activities to suit their own needs. On 9 November 2005, Mary Hanafin, Minister for Education and Science opened a conference by Age Action Ireland, *Lifelong Learning & Older People: Contexts and Challenges*. More than 120 people attended, representing groups such as U3As, active retirement groups, VECs, nursing homes and various voluntary and statutory organisations throughout the country. Minister Hanafin said that the conference had "an important role in raising awareness of the learning opportunities that are available for older people and of the real benefits of pursuing these". She also stated that "...there is no shortage of older people who want to learn, but the opportunities must be there for them to do so."

Socio-Economic Disadvantage

The Irish Statutory Committee on Educational Disadvantage (2005) 'proposes a new strategy that places the solutions to educational disadvantage within an inclusive lifelong learning framework' (p4) and recommend need to 'build partnerships between school-based and community based education' and to 'make the school a focal point of community education' (p34). This point has recently been reiterated in the book *Beyond Educational Disadvantage* (Downes & Gilligan, eds; 2007).

Socio-economic disadvantage is closely related to educational disadvantage; thus attempts to alleviate both take similar strategies. If the perceived wisdom is that one of the routes out of poverty is education then it must follow that Lifelong Learning is vital from 'cradle to grave'. Tackling socio-economic/educational disadvantage begins at pre-school level, incorporating research and initiatives around early start programmes, in and out of school supports and school completion programmes. Post compulsory school initiatives include Back to Education Initiatives, Senior Traveller Training Centres, *Youthreach*, VTOS, Education Adult Guidance Service, Education Equality Initiative, Community Education Programmes and special initiatives for disadvantaged adults. Other initiatives include homeless, asylum, disability, drug and court initiatives. The National Educational Welfare Board

(NEWB), established in 2001 includes representatives from the education partners and State Agencies with the emphasis on assistance to schools, families and children rather than penalties.

The Combat Poverty Agency (CPA) policy submission (2003) set a target to reduce the proportion of early school leavers nationally to 10% by 2005. Their annual report (2004) notes that the targets in the National Anti Poverty Strategy (NAPS) and National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion (NAPs/incl) to reduce early school leavers to 85% by 2003 and to 90% by 2006 is "unlikely" to be met "although programmes are being put in place to support this objective" (p12).

The Educational Disadvantage Committee – provided for in Section 32 of the Education Act – advised the Minister on policies and strategies to be adopted to identify and correct educational disadvantage. The Committee included in its membership a number of people from voluntary and other bodies who have objectives or experience in the area of tackling disadvantage. This Committee finished its initial remit in 2005 and a new committee has yet to be appointed.

A joint FÁS/VEC Return to Education Programme, which combined work experience within the Community Employment Scheme with intensive literacy tuition, is also being expanded nationally.

A workplace literacy programme has been piloted successfully and is being extended to all local authority areas, in co-operation with LANPAG (the Local Authority National Partnership Board). A workplace literacy group with the key social partners and education and training agencies recommended the establishment of a Workplace Basic Education Fund (WBEF) which came into being in 2004. The WBEF is operationalised under a Skills for Work initiative that in turn operates under the *One Step Up* umbrella of services provided by FÁS and aimed at workers in the private sector (DES). Another issue that is very prevalent in Ireland (and all over Europe) is the 'Matthew Effect', whereby adults with the lowest levels of initial education and training are the least likely to undertake structured learning and vice versa.

Addressing Specific Learning Difficulties

The National Learning Network (NLN) provides assessment and support for adolescents and adults with specific learning difficulties such as Dyslexia and Dyspraxia. Staff at the centre also provide functional strategies and support for other associated specific processing/learning difficulties such as Asperger's Syndrome and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. The NLN/BUA Centre promotes inclusive education nationally through its unique screening facility together with comprehensive educational, vocational and functional activity support services for third level students and adult learners with Specific Processing/Learning Difficulties.

Furthermore, the NLN Business Development Department is working towards two full awards at FETAC Level 6 as CPD in Rehabilitation and in Inclusive Education. A number of modules have been developed and are accredited. It is intended that these awards will be submitted to FETAC in full by the end of 2007 (NLN).

In addition, NALA have produced policy guidelines around learning disabilities generally (1999) and Specific Learning Difficulties (NALA, 2004) and since 1998 make provision of accredited training for practitioners on learning difficulties in partnership with Waterford Institute of Technology.

Effectiveness of Lifelong Learning Policies

Increased Participation

Approximately 300,000 adults take part in both formal and informal education each year in Ireland. Statistics compiled and published by AONTAS, the National Association of Adult Education, show the various categories in which these adults participate (See Appendix 1). The figures cited for 2005 show an increase of approximately 30,000 individuals, representing a 10% rise in the numbers of adults participating in lifelong learning initiatives when compared to figures collated in 2004. However, it must be noted, that these are approximate figures compiled annually by AONTAS, as no comprehensive national database of statistics for participation in adult and community education is currently available.

FÁS, *Youthreach* and the STTCs have been particularly effective with regard to the participation of Travellers according to the following statistics from December 2004. There were 400 Travellers registered with FÁS employment services, 325 participating in *Youthreach* and 981 Travellers over the age of fifteen registered with the Senior Traveller Training Centres. In the STTCs, 248 of those registered were under eighteen years of age, the majority being aged between eighteen and forty-five. However, there is a lack of statistics for FÁS and *Youthreach* regarding immigrants.

Infra-Structural Developments

Some of the infra-structural developments that have taken place since 2000 and which are resulting in increased participation in lifelong learning within the formal education sector include:

- Designation of a Minister for State with responsibility for Adult Education to drive the lifelong learning agenda at the cabinet table.
- The establishment of the National Education Welfare Board (NEWB) to address early school leaving
- The implementation of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) (2003)
- The establishment of the National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education under the auspices of the HEA to facilitate and monitor participation of under-represented groups in third level education.

In relation to impacting positively on participation in

the non-formal and informal sectors the following developments are seen as fundamental:

- The work on the ground of Community Education Facilitators whose role, in actively encouraging and promoting links between both formal and informal education providers, is to help create a positive learning experience for adults engaged in community education.
- The Adult Education Guidance Initiative which provides adult student support in the form of guidance/counselling
- NALA has developed an assessment framework for adult basic education, entitled Mapping the Learning Journey (NALA 2003), and has completed a two-year mainstreaming programme with VEC adult literacy services to support its introduction. NALA is also completing research into the development of a curriculum framework, due for publication in September 2007.
- AONTAS is also in the process of developing its Quality Assurance Framework for Women's Community Education in order to heighten visibility of the important work engaged in by its women's groups; it aims to support them and to demonstrate the uniqueness of their work and to provide a quality benchmark for it.

Increased Dedicated Funding

2005 saw some €138million expenditure by the Irish government dedicated to adult and further education. The HEA strategic initiative scheme to promote access increased from €3million in 2000 to €7.3m in 2005.

In relation to adult literacy, since publication of the OECD's International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS), the provision in the education sector for adult literacy has increased from a base of €1.079m in 1997 through €23m in 2006. Overall €93.4m has been committed to this area across the 6 years of the NDP 2001-2006, with a target of reaching 113,000 clients.

These infra-structural developments and designated funding allow agencies/organisations and institutions to provide sustainable core services and build capacity in relation to lifelong learning both within the organisation and for its learners and learning community.

Policy Recommendations

It is widely acknowledged that lifelong learning has an important role in addressing the issues of poverty and disadvantage. It is incumbent on the Irish Government and the relevant stakeholders in lifelong learning in Ireland to ensure that lifelong learning does not in fact lead to more inequality, in that the advantages accruing from participation in further education and training are disproportionately available to those which are already better educated and therefore, better able to afford to pay for such participation.

There is also an overarching need to ensure that the many policies and targets commitments are fully realised. Planning, implementation and review are necessary to achieve the goals set out.

Key recommendations include:

1. LITERACY

Stakeholders indicate that a number of specific and core issues are critical to meeting the policy commitments in the NDP and the social partnership agreement for the development of adult literacy. Addressing these requirements can, it is envisaged, make a significant contribution to tackling social inclusion, poverty and interculturalism issues.

1.1 Development of a new literacy strategy: Updating a National Adult Literacy Programme to facilitate development and expansion.

There is a need for:
a) A monitoring of progress in the achievement of the target set by the Minister of Education and Science "to halve the number of adults in the population who have a literacy problem" (January 26th 2007) and identified in the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education and Science *Report on Adult Literacy* (May 2006). However, halving the number of adults with a literacy problem is still an inadequate response and more ambitious targets and resourcing needs to be set;
b) A new National Adult Literacy Programme be drawn up to facilitate the structural development requirement in *Towards 2016* (p48) and to accommodate expansion in participation;
c) Significant funding increases in annual budgets to reach €125 million by 2013 as recommended

by the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education and Science *Report on Adult Literacy*;
d) The establishment of a coherent staffing structure;
e) Dedicated/ring-fenced budget lines to assist the further development of literacy services to include intensive, family, numeracy, distance and workplace options, and the integration of literacy development into other further education and training programmes. Although €800,000 is allocated for a family literacy project from 2006-2010 under the DEIS budget line, this does not amount to a dedicated family literacy budget called for by the Committee on Educational Disadvantage.
f) A more adequately funded and comprehensive community arts strategy where the arts are integrated with literacy needs in order to help overcome adults' fear of failure.

1.2 English or ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) policy and services to migrants, to include literacy support.

a) A clear policy on ESOL and English services to meet the needs of migrant workers as well as asylum seekers and refugees, especially those with less than Level 4 qualifications.
b) Provision of dedicated resources to ESOL service provision of €10 million, separate to current adult literacy budgets.

2. WORKPLACE EDUCATION
Workplace education needs to be expanded.

2.1 There is a need for the introduction of paid educational leave entitlement for employees with less than a Level 4 qualification wishing to improve their literacy and numeracy, in order to meet the targets outlined in the National Skills Strategy (2007). The Statutory Committee on Educational Disadvantage (2005) notes that 'Ireland lags behind other industrialised countries in having no legislative basis for paid educational leave to enable people to gain qualifications later in life, having been educationally disadvantaged in their earlier years'.

Furthermore, the proposed Action Plan for the EU Communication on Adult Learning calls for 'Member States to create the right for adults who left school, without any formal qualification to restart/continue their basic education at any time throughout their lives with adequate financial support.'

3. GENUINE REGIONAL EDUCATIONAL STRUCTURES

3.1 In contrast to current regional educational structures which do not have devolved budgets nor decision-making powers, there is a need for genuine regional educational structures which would be able to make decisions around the analysis of regional needs, the development of strategies for the integration of services at a local level and the allocation of funding and resources. This would enable the voices of local communities and target groups to be better heard.

4. COMMUNITY EDUCATION

4.1 There is a need for ring-fenced funding for community education to ensure continuity of staff and medium term strategic planning

4.2 The Higher Education Authority - HEA (2005, p.24) report concludes that: 'Community-based funding to achieve equity of access has been limited in scope, with only one, relatively small, source available, namely the Millennium Fund. There seems to be considerable potential in whole-community and region-based responses to achieve equity of access'.

4.3 The Home-School Community Liaison Scheme tends to be confined to the hours of the school day when many parents are working. There is a need for expansion of the scope of this scheme to include working with the parents in evening times

5. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE WHITE PAPER
There is a need for:

5.1 Speedier implementation of the White Paper and increased proportion of the education budget to lifelong learning.

5.2 The reinstatement of the National Adult Learning Council (NALC) post haste; it is needed to promote and co-ordinate the development of the sector.

5.3 An awareness of the possible exclusion of learners on the proposed, and not yet established, NALC. It is a concern that learners with low literacy levels are overlooked in the definition of Adult Education in the White Paper.

5.4 An increase in the representation of the community sector and the inclusion of learner and volunteer representation on the relevant boards.

5.5 Clarification on the precise relationship between the proposed NALCs with the local Vocational Education Committee literacy services.

5.6 More follow through in priority implementation of the Local Adult Learning Boards for local lifelong learning. It is recommended that local and regional structures would have more autonomy regarding budgets. There is a need to remedy the major weakness of National Adult Learning Council's lack of scope for decision-making regarding the function of allocating resources, as well as its failure to be implemented.

5.7 Awareness of an increased bureaucracy bringing with it the danger of consultation overload.

5.8 An explicit recognition that literacy education has strong links to community education in its ethos; a lack of reference to literacy training as a form of Community Education is a major weakness.

6. PART-TIME STUDENTS

6.1 There is a need to address the Fees issue for part-time students as it is a significant barrier to participation in higher education. Currently students entering 'conventional courses' within third level education via the CAO do not pay fees, while part-time courses including modular degree courses and distance learning courses incur *full* fees. This militates against flexible provisions/supports for mature students.

7. ETHNICITY AND NATIONALITY

There is a need for:

7.1 An integrated cross-generational approach to the education of the Travelling community, including grandparents, parents, secondary and primary school age children and more consultation between Travellers and third level institutions to improve access of Travellers to third level.

7.2 The ensuring of specific strategies for integration of Travellers into mainstream options other than *Youthreach* and the STTC programmes; these strategies include issues of awareness training, culturally relevant programmes and materials, an inter-cultural anti-racist curriculum, supporting services such as guidance and childcare and outreach networking and dialogue with Traveller organisations and individuals concerning the delivery of programmes.

7.3 A clear policy on ESOL and English services to meet the needs of asylum seekers and refugees and migrant workers, particularly those with low/no qualifications.

7.4 Provision of dedicated resources to ESOL service provision of €10 million, separate to current adult literacy budgets.

7.5 More provision of country specific materials for non-English speaking adults and for State strategy to develop accredited community leaders representing ethnic minorities, including Travellers.

7.6 The further development of the potential role of adult education in the integration of spouses (often female) of migrant workers given that they cannot work without an employment permit of their own and thus are, in general, at risk of isolation. The issue of adequate childcare resources is necessarily a key dimension in this respect.

7.7 Facilitation of access to third level education for international children; the policy of requiring payment of 'international student fees' once they reach 18 years of age rather than the same fees as Irish college students, no matter how long they have been resident in the country needs to be redressed.

8. DISABILITY

There is a need for:

8.1 Investment in training for staff of educational facilities to adequately respond to the needs of those with disabilities. Such training should cover:
a) General disability awareness, in terms of the barriers facing those with disabilities, empowerment and inclusion, social marginalisation etc.
b) Specific adaptations of tuition methods for those with disabilities, with consideration of different categories of disabilities and the differing needs they bring.
c) Accessibility of materials e. g. not relying solely on written notes but also distributing notes by email to allow for the use of individual computer access methods.
d) Training in basic Assistive Technology (AT) for appropriate staff, including the accessibility features built in to many mainstream packages such as Microsoft Office and the use of basic AT devices.

8.2 The appointment of access officers and disability services within mainstream educational facilities needs to be expanded from the larger university-type institutions to more community-based, grass-roots education-providers.

9. PRISONS

9.1 Oates (2007, p100) highlights that 'the [18] interviews revealed that there was no evidence of peer tutoring in either Mountjoy or the Training Unit, contrary to recommendations made in Morgan and Kett's Prison Adult Literacy Survey (2003, p61) and Kett's Guidelines for Quality Literacy Work in Prisons (2002, p6) for the establishment of a peer support programme'. Peer support programmes in programmes clearly need to be established.

9.2 Oates (2007, p110) notes the following example of good practice which deserves wider application: 'The Training Unit have implemented, on a small

scale, a community orientation programme in which the student/prisoners attend community post-release programmes such as Pathways and other community based programmes. This is in line with the Council of Europe documents, Education in Prison (1990) and European Prison Rules (1987)…While this programme is of paramount importance it should be implemented on a much greater scale'.

It is of concern that 'there is no educational provision in Cloverhill prison despite the fact that it has had a purpose built school for eight years. The practical implication put forward here is a simple one, education provision be established immediately in Cloverhill' (Oates 2007, p117).

9.3 Institutional barriers to accessing education in prison such as 'landings being locked' (Oates 2007) or being transferred just prior to an exam need to be overcome in order to give fulfilment to education as a priority in prison.

10. GENERAL
There is a need for:

10.1 State institutions to have written policies/proofing on how they plan to overcome the barriers from differences of socio/economic, ethnicity (including Travellers), disability and gender. Literacy proofing policies are specifically required and include literacy awareness training, whole organization approach and plain English statement requirements.

10.2 More distance education; while a number of initiatives have been undertaken, exemplified by the work of NALA in this regard specifically in relation to the TV series supported by web, phone and print supports, nonetheless, distance education is an emerging and growing area and warrants strategic attention.

10.3 The good practice of local schools being sites for learning for adults to be extended more consistently nationally. The potential for the development of the extended school is huge. Schools are publicly provided and well equipped resources that should be used at evenings, weekends, vacation times, etc. to facilitate lifelong learning opportunities. The UK model of the extended school is worth exploring. It is not just in socio-economically disadvantaged areas that schools could be opened up for the purpose of community-based learning projects; it could be done in every community. It is acknowledged however, that a number of adults might not wish to return to school environments because of earlier school-based experiences where they were failed by the system. Thus a broad range of other arrangements and sites of provision need to be made available in the community.

10.4 Curriculum reform at secondary level to be more learner-centred and aware of adult education/lifelong learning principles.

10.5 Developing teacher training, especially at second level, with a view to teachers developing conflict resolution skills and constructivist teaching methodologies with their students right through the education system. If student-teacher-school engagement is not addressed, the genuine establishment of the lifelong learning agenda will be made significantly more difficult than it needs to be. Teaching and learning needs to be redefined in contemporary terms and this new definition needs to inform teacher training, teacher in-service, curriculum design, programme delivery, etc.

10.6 Better supports are required for the National Framework of Qualifications, particularly at levels 1 and 2, where there is a lack of progress relative to the other eight levels.

10.7 The Government's funding strategies to target disadvantage across the educational spectrum given the prominence of the education disadvantage (now educational inclusion) agenda. Development of family literacy needs ring fenced funding particularly in disadvantaged areas.

10.8 The strengthening of research links between educational disadvantage and lifelong learning.

10.9 The provision of increased childcare and eldercare to encourage adults to go back into education.

10.10 Clarification about the timeframe and plans for development of dedicated career paths for practitioners.

10.11 The evidence of explicit intention to involve volunteers in proposed Forum of Practitioners (not yet established).

10.12 A master concept of lifelong learning among the many policy documents to be addressed.

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Appendix 1: Participation in Adult Education in Ireland

Scheme	Numbers	Date	Source
Literacy Schemes	40,678 (Incl. 12,133 ESOL)	2007	Department of Education and Science
Senior Traveller Training Centres (STTCs)	1,084	December 2006	Senior Traveller Training Centre figures
Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS)	5,377	July 2007	Central Statistics Office
Youthreach[26] Plus 400 new places provided in 2007	3,292	July 2007	Central Statistics Office
Post Leaving Cert Courses (PLCs)	30,188	Academic year 2006/7	Department of Education and Science
Community Education	40,000+ participants in women's groups	2005	AONTAS Estimate
Back to Education Initiative (BTEI)- Formal and Informal Strand	24,728	December 2006	Further Education Development Unit, DES www.education.ie
Mature students aged 23+ yrs Full-time in HEA Institutions	23,715	October 2006	HEA www.hea.ie
Mature students aged 23+ yrs Full-time in Institutes of Technology	9,578	2004	Further Education Development Unit, DES www.education.ie
Night-time / evening courses	147,000	2000	White Paper, Department of Education & Science (DES) www.education.ie
Distance Learning - *Oscail*	1,417	2007	Oscail www.oscail.ie

[26] FÁS fund an additional 2,100 Youthreach places in Community Training Centres

Appendix 2: Research Institutions in LLL2010 Consortium

1. Institute for International and Social Studies, Tallinn University, Estonia

2. Higher Institute for Labour Studies, Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium

3. University of Nottingham, England, United Kingdom

4. Moray House School of Education, University of Edinburgh, Scotland, United Kingdom

5. Educational Disadvantage Centre, St. Patrick's College, Dublin City University, Ireland

6. Fafo Institute for Labour and Social Research, Oslo, Norway

7. Slovenian Institute for Adult Education, Ljubljana, Slovenia

8. TÁRKI Social Research Centre, Budapest, Hungary

9. Centre for International Relations and Studies, Mykolo Romerio University, Vilnius, Lithuania

10. Institute of Sociology, Bucharest, Bulgaria

11. St. Petersburg State University: Department of Sociology, Department of Retraining and Improvement of Professional Skills for Sociology and Social Work, Russia

12. 3s research laboratory, Vienna / Danube University, Krems, Austria

13. The National Training Fund, Prague, Czech Republic

14. Institute for Social Research, Vilnius, Lithuania

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