



PRIORITY AREAS FOR ACTION WITHIN THE ADULT AND COMMUNITY EDUCATION SECTOR

A Submission to the Minister for Education and Science by the Educational Disadvantage Committee

INTRODUCTION

The Educational Disadvantage Committee urges the Department of Education and Science to give greater recognition to the important contribution adult education can make to breaking the cycle of educational disadvantage. The Committee is keenly aware that adults who are themselves educationally disadvantaged are crucially in need of support if they are to develop their own capacities and to make an impact on their children's chances of taking up and sustaining learning opportunities. To this end the Committee recommends systemic and structural changes which gives recognition and resources to the Adult and Community Education Sector as a distinct and equal Sector of the Education System, thus making lifelong learning a reality.

This paper sets out the priority areas for actions within the Further and Adult Education sector. The White Paper (2000) on Adult Education entitled *Learning for Life*, is the definitive policy statement of the Government and therefore underpins any recommendations of the Educational Disadvantage Committee. Other policy developments have and will affect the growth and effectiveness of the Adult Education Service, in particular the National Qualifications Framework, the Report of the Taskforce on Lifelong Learning, the Report of the Working Group on Access to Higher Education and the establishment of the National Adult Learning Council, and at EU level the memorandum on Lifelong Learning produced by the European Commission in March 2000. More recently, the ESRI mid-term review (Oct.2003)¹ recommended increased resources in the achievement of the lifelong learning agenda.

Since the publication of the White Paper a number of recommendations have been or are in the process of being implemented while others have not been addressed. Since one of the key roles of the Adult Education Service has been, and will continue to be to provide access for adult learners who did not have the opportunity to fully engage in education delivered through the formal structures and institutions first time round, it has a crucial impact to make in combating educational disadvantage and needs to be recognised as a full partner in education. The Educational Disadvantage Committee has deliberated on the current state of the Adult Education Service and recommends the continued implementation of the recommendations of the White Paper. Staying with its terms of reference the Committee has prioritised developments as follows:-

¹ *The Mid-Term Evaluation of the National Development Plan and Community Support Framework for Ireland, 2000 to 2006: Final Report to the Department of Finance, ESRI, Dublin October, 2003*

CO-ORDINATING SERVICES

The National Adult Learning Council (NALC) proposed in the White Paper is designed to have a key coordinating role and was established without statute in April 2002. The White Paper on the Technical Units and staffing of the Council recommended certain structures, however, we are aware that a review has been undertaken by the Central Policy Unit in the Department of the terms and reference of NALC. The Educational Disadvantage Committee stresses the need for an overall coordinating structure and recommends the establishment of the Council on a statutory footing as soon as possible.

Action needed:

The Educational Disadvantage Committee stresses the need for an overall coordinating structure and recommends the establishment of the Council on a statutory footing as soon as possible.

BASIC AND SECOND CHANCE EDUCATION

Since the publication of the International Adult Literacy Survey, an increased investment has been made in the field of adult literacy and a number of innovative developments have been implemented in an attempt to tackle the literacy problem. The budget for literacy has risen to approximately €18.2m in 2003 from €1m in 1997 and a National Adult Literacy Strategy has been developed for the first time.

However there are still some challenges. Currently adults wishing to improve their basic education can avail, on average, of only two hours tuition per week for approximately 30 weeks per year. The success of the Vocational Educational Committee (VEC) adult literacy service in developing its provision has created an even larger demand for basic education opportunities. In order to meet this demand, it will be necessary to develop a greater number of tuition opportunities on a national basis. The following initiatives are key to significantly raising adult literacy levels in Ireland.

Literacy Advisory Group

The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) has brought together representatives of the VEC, FÁS, the Library Council, the Department of Social and Family Affairs (DSFA) and the Department of Education and Science (DES) to devise an implementation plan for the National Adult Literacy Programme up to 2006 and to identify post 2006 priorities. The group will present the report to the DES and the Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA) for adoption in May 2004. Since the publication of the White Paper key stakeholders, including the Department of Education and Science (DES), involved in the adult literacy sector were brought together by NALA to devise an implementation plan for the National Adult Literacy Programme up to 2006 and to identify post 2006 priorities. It is the intention of the group to feed into the National Adult Learning Council when it is fully established. In the meantime the group is progressing the development of a model VEC adult literacy service as well as staffing norms and protocols on key service areas.

Intensive Basic Education

With the constraints of existing resource provision, an average of 2 hours per week for thirty weeks is all that can be offered within the VEC's current budget and this level of support militates against sequential learning progress.

Action needed:

Increase in the number of intensive basic education opportunities.

Workplace Basic Education

The vast majority of adults with poor literacy skills are in the workforce and are typically associated with low skilled jobs.

Attempts to develop workplace basic education programmes in the private sector have been problematic. The absence of statutory support for workers to engage in education and training hampers the development of this type of work. In addition most staff training programmes assume that participants have basic literacy: this is an incorrect assumption which leads to many workers being excluded from a whole range of work based training programmes. The NALA *Workplace Basic Education Strategy* (2002) is a feature of *Sustaining Progress* (2003) and it is envisaged it will be progressed through the partnership process.

Action needed:

A workplace basic education fund to be established and in line with the recommendations of the Taskforce on Lifelong Learning, the government should commit to the introduction of statutory learning leave for people with less than a Leaving Certificate level qualification.

Family Literacy

Since the 1990s, a number of VEC adult literacy services have been providing family literacy programmes. These programmes aim to raise the literacy levels of parents and carers, who wish to help the children in their lives. The range and variety of programmes which now exists in Ireland is currently under investigation with a view to informing the development of a national family literacy policy. However, in order to provide nationwide coverage of family literacy programmes, dedicated resources will be required, as well as the development of partnerships with other educational services working in this area.

Action needed:

Dedicated Family Literacy budget.

Adult Numeracy

The term "literacy" is often used to cover the areas of speaking, listening, reading, writing and numeracy. However there is significant international evidence that the low usage of the term numeracy or basic maths has influenced the relatively low availability of specific tuition in this area and the low participation rates in numeracy tuition. NALA recently conducted research into this area and with the contribution of adult numeracy academies providers and learners has drawn up a list of

recommendations and a strategy for the way forward. The report will be published in early 2004. The key recommendations relate to the areas of tutor training, resource materials, assessment and accreditation.

Action needed:

Adoption of the forthcoming national numeracy strategy.

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)

Asylum Seekers without the right to work can only access educational support through the VEC Adult Literacy Service. NALA conducted an audit of ESOL services within VEC adult literacy centres in 2002. This information was presented to a multi-stakeholder working group which produced a set of guidelines and recommendations for the future development of ESOL services. These include new approaches to outreach and promotion; different types of provision; a new form of assessment and accreditation; and additional training and supports. The *ESOL: Policy Guidelines and Supports for VEC Adult Literacy Schemes* (2003) echoed many of the recommendations from the research publication *Asylum Seekers in Education: A Study of language and Literacy Needs* (2002) and the *IVEA Policy on Educational Provision for Asylum Seekers, Refugees and other Non-nationals* (2001). The need for ESOL services is arising across the full range of further education.

Action needed:

Further progress on the implementation of ESOL recommendations, most notably an inter-departmental approach and a national strategy for ESOL services.

Adults with Specific Learning Difficulties

The exact numbers of adults experiencing a specific learning difficulty in Ireland is unclear but there is no doubt that many adults accessing adult literacy services experience some form of learning difficulty. There are also people presenting with Specific Learning Difficulties in other further education provision, in particular YOUTHREACH. The National Educational Psychological Service does not provide its services to adults or assist practitioners in the further education sector. The Taskforce on Dyslexia excluded adults from its terms of reference but its Report in 2002 noted that several submissions highlighted this exclusion and made suggestions about the need for intensive adult literacy provision. NALA has established a multi-stakeholder working group to assist in the publication of policy guidelines for working with adults with specific learning difficulties. It is anticipated that additional resources will be required to equip all further education services to better meet the needs of this client group.

Action needed:

Development of appropriate assessment, tuition and support systems for adults with specific learning difficulties, within the VEC adult literacy service as well as other further education and training programmes.

National Assessment Framework for Adult Basic Education – *Mapping the Learning Journey*

As part of the widespread consultation relating to the development of the quality framework for adult basic education in 1998, the desire for a national assessment framework was articulated by learners, tutors and senior managers. The process to devise an assessment framework began in earnest in 1999 with a one year detailed consultation process combined with research of best practice internationally. After a further two years of piloting this assessment framework, which is designed to support teaching and learning, it is now ready to be implemented nationally. The Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA) are recommending VECs adopt the Framework and envisage this will happen on a phased basis and subject to resources being made available to them, by the DES, for this purpose.

Action needed:

Provision of a small one-off additional resource to VECs to enable them adopt the assessment framework, *Mapping the Learning Journey*.

The message from the success of the *Read Write Now* series commissioned by the Department of Education and Science is clear i.e. tackling disadvantage requires not only significant resources but also creative and flexible approaches that take account of the life circumstances of adult learners. It is important to develop and resource these initiatives.

Action needed:

As the Literacy Programme is a key pillar of the White Paper 2000, the service will continue to need priority investment and substantial expansion if it is to be effective in the long term.

Back to Education Initiative (BTEI)

Another initiative currently being implemented is the Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) which was designed to increase more flexible second chance education provision for adult learners, with a particular focus on adults with less than upper second level education. The first phase of BTEI known as the formal strand carries with it an allocation of approximately €17.5m and provides a total of 6491 places and approximately 1.5m tuition hours across VEC, secondary, community and comprehensive schools. Activity commenced in most counties prior to December 2002.

Funding for the Community Strand of the BTEI was approved in early 2003 for 64 projects throughout the country. The community strand is set to provide 689 places with 136,210 tuition hours at a cost of approximately €1.5. While it is too early to assess the effectiveness of the BTEI, already some issues have begun to emerge as problematic, notably the lack of integrated childcare/eldercare and the differences in supports provided by other providers such as FÁS and Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) thus setting a competitive edge for the whole programme.

Action needed:

A re-appraisal of the appropriateness and effectiveness of the selection criteria for participants to take account of the sensitivities and circumstances of targeted learners.

Evaluation of the effectiveness of the BTEI with a view to expansion

Standardisation of learner supports through inter-departmental collaboration.

Adoption of a policy of integrated childcare/eldercare for all further education and training programmes funded by the State.

THE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF PARENTS

Professor Peter Evans of the OECD in his keynote address at the first Educational Disadvantage Forum identified a number of key differences between old style non-integrated services and new style integrated services to address educational disadvantage. Among these he identified the balance between prevention and intervention, the need for family oriented services and the importance of community based services. Any intervention therefore to address educational disadvantage must take account of the needs of both children **and their families and communities**. The role that education can play in breaking down so called 'intergenerational poverty' and disadvantage is well known.

Initiatives such as family literacy programmes and the Home School Community Liaison Scheme have already been identified as one of the ways of including parents in their children's education from an adult learning perspective, while community-based women's education groups have long been involved in supporting parents through their parenting and childcare programmes. The recent research commissioned by AONTAS on behalf of the DES entitled *Gender and Learning(2003)*, gave a powerful insight into just how alienated from education adult learners felt as a result of their school experiences. Such adults are unlikely to become engaged in school activities as parents. However, it did show that once they took up educational activities themselves they grew in levels of confidence and competence and provided powerful role models for their own children. Adults however do not often continue their education in a linear fashion. They may need to drop in and out of the system many times for family work or health reasons. **Programmes therefore need to be flexible enough to allow people to take up where they left off and other supports need to be in place to enable them to return to education when they are ready.** In other words provision needs to be organised around the needs of the learner rather than vice versa. This approach is the hallmark of community education.

COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Increasingly it is being recognised that education plays an indispensable role in addressing and overcoming poverty, disadvantage and social exclusion. Yet over the years, the inflexibility of the formal education system in Ireland gave rise to a need within many communities for more accessible forms of education to provide

opportunities to those suffering from exclusion in its many forms. This need was met, and is still being met, by the emergence within communities of a distinctive and organic form of education, now recognised as Community Education. It is described in the White Paper 2000 as '*amongst the most dynamic, creative and relevant components of Adult Education in Ireland*' (p.112).

The National Millennium project in its final research report *Knowledge is Power-Woman and Education* (NWCI, 2001, pages 30-31) gave voice to many of the issues that prevent women from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds from returning to community education. The recommendations by these women for change are visionary and await the commitment and resources from government to be implemented. Furthermore the women in this national sample are clear that inter-generational education is key if the cycle of poverty is to be broken.

Hundreds of community-based groups around Ireland act as an access point for thousands of what are termed hard to reach adults who would otherwise be excluded from second chance education. Their success in attracting the hardest to reach adults lies in their approach in terms of respect for the individual learner's needs and circumstances and their development of provision which allows for the non-linear and often fragmented way that adults take up learning opportunities. Not only do these groups provide access points for learners who are hard to reach, but they also have the potential to provide progression routes into Further and Higher Education, Training and work. They also play a key role in the development of civil society through their work of empowering communities to participate in policy and decision making.

While many of these groups have a specific anti-poverty focus and are not funded by the DES, nonetheless their core work is education. Such groups have been funded by the Department of Social, Family and Community Affairs through the Community Development Programme. Currently this programme is under review, having been moved to the Department of Rural, Community and Gaeltacht Affairs and many groups are experiencing difficulties with uncertainty and delays in funding.

Those groups who are supported under the DES generally receive their support through the Adult Literacy and Community Education (ACLE) budget. The major part of this budget, however is allocated to Adult Literacy leaving only small amounts available to community groups. The White Paper recommended the recruitment of Community Education Facilitators (CEF) by the 33 VECs throughout the country. This development is regarded as tremendously important in the attempt to link non-formal and formal education to provide progression routes across a range of provision. The CEFs are already engaged in supporting existing groups and nurturing the development of new ones. A Training and Support service is being provided by AONTAS in collaboration with the DES and the VECs. Models of good practice involving strong partnership approaches between the community and statutory education providers already exist.

Action needed:

In order for community education to develop its full potential it must be allocated specific programme funding which is specifically ring-fenced for it, through an increase in the ALCE budget. Access to this funding should be based

on specific criteria developed collaboratively by the VECs, DES and community education groups.

Education Equality Initiatives

One key initiative that has been implemented in recent years to address adult educational disadvantage is the Education Equality Initiative (EEI). The evaluation review of the projects shows some common threads emerging from the experiences of those working on the ground which reinforce what is already known but not often documented by providers in the sector.

Among the issues identified two are crucial to attracting disadvantaged people into education i.e. time and flexibility.

In order to attract the most disadvantaged adults into education a range of approaches and incentives need to be adopted. These include active outreach work, neighbourhood worker schemes, buddy systems and a range of activities which may at the outset not include any educational activities at all. Examples of such approaches are those used by groups funded under the EEI which has provided models of good practice in the area of educational disadvantage. The research report commissioned by AONTAS on behalf of the Department of Education and Science, **Gender and Learning (2003)** has also made a series of recommendations about the provision of education and training opportunities based on the articulated needs of men and women. Such approaches need to be mainstreamed and resourced.

Action needed:

More flexible forms of funding need to be introduced which recognise the variety of approaches that need to be adopted in order to attract the hardest to reach learners.

Increased eligibility for those in low income households and additional financial incentives for participants in education. Motivation and enticements are needed to break the cycle of disadvantage and encourage the first move towards a return to education.

Demonstrable models of good practice developed through the EEI, NOW programmes and other pilot funded initiatives should be funded through incorporation into mainstream adult community education provision.

HIGHER EDUCATION

Currently Ireland has one of the lowest rates of participation by adults in higher education. While finance is certainly a major factor especially in the case of adults adopting part-time, modular or distance education, it is only one factor. The issues raised earlier in this paper illustrate the importance of support for early learning from pre- school onwards and for community education if a culture of learning is to be established in homes and communities. The Report of the Action Group on Access to Higher Education published in 2001 addressed the issues of access to higher education by mature students as well as economically disadvantaged and disabled

people. Many of its recommendations are being implemented but others have so far not been progressed.

Action needed:

Through the National Access Office to progress the full implementation of the recommendations of the Action Group on Access to Higher Education.

SUPPORTS

Childcare/eldercare and Transport

One of the key supports identified by both research and by the feedback from local providers is /eldercare. Feedback from the adult education guidance projects has also highlighted the main barriers to access as lack of childcare/eldercare, transport and finance. Models of practice developed under the EEI and other programmes which provide childcare/eldercare and transport costs have been proven to be successful in ensuring access for the most disadvantaged people.

Action needed:

Costs pertaining to childcare/eldercare and transport should, as a matter of course, be integrated into programmes addressing educational disadvantage and administered in such a way as to be the least bureaucratic for participants. Such an approach would have to involve much greater co-operation at inter-Departmental level.

Information and Guidance

Access to good advice and information is a key issue for adults returning to education and training. In 2000 a pilot adult educational guidance initiative was set up under the auspices of the National Development Plan. With a budget of €45m during the lifetime of the NDP the main aim was to pilot a guidance service for adults with a view to mainstreaming it at the end of the plan. The Initiative is now in its third phase and is serving 25 areas throughout the country. The main target groups are adult literacy students, VTOS participants and other learners participating in adult and community education. Feedback from the projects to the Advisory Group shows that the Service has indeed highlighted and created an unmet demand for information, guidance and where appropriate therapeutic counselling, in excess of its ability to service it. The evaluation of the first phase has also shown that there are gaps in provision across the country especially in the large rural counties where childcare/eldercare and transport provision continues to be an issue. The funding available to the projects as they develop is often inadequate and the fourth phase of the pilot will not be implemented during 2004. Furthermore the position of staff within the projects is insecure and therefore projects are in danger of losing trained and experienced personnel unless this issue is addressed.

Action needed:

Funding which has been earmarked for the AEGI under the NDP 2000-2006 should continue to be invested in the development of a comprehensive Adult

Educational Guidance Service which will be mainstreamed in 2006.

Phase 4 of the pilot should be initiated as a matter of urgency.

It is also crucial that the development of the service continues to be monitored and actions taken to support it where appropriate

CONCLUSION

It is an outdated approach to look upon formal and non-formal education, child and adult literacy, work and non-work related learning as in competition; they must all be addressed within the single realm of lifelong learning. It is cumulative learning that counts, young learning leads to adult learning, adult learning is needed to support the next generations and so the cycle continues. It is therefore of the utmost importance that the recommendations contained in this paper, and those consistently made from within the adult education sector be at the heart of government policy when strategies to tackle educational disadvantage are developed.

Appendix 1

Report on the Educational Disadvantage Forum – Adult Learners' Focus Group Meeting 12th February 2004

Attendance

- *Minister Síle de Valera*
- *Members of the Educational Disadvantage Committee*
 - *Professor Áine Hyland*
 - *Inez Bailey*
 - *Berni Brady*
 - *Rita Conway*
 - *Maura Grant*
 - *Paddy McDonagh*

Also present

- **Pauline Gildea, Principal Officer, Further Education Section, Department of Education and Science (DES)**
 - **Helen Keogh, VTOS, National Co-ordinator**
- *Jim Donovan, Assistant Principal Officer, Social Inclusion Unit, DES*
- *Tracey Shanks, Social Inclusion Unit, DES*
- *Niamh Keaveney, AONTAS*

Adult Learners:

- *Bridget Cunningham, Tallaght Traveler Development Centre*
- *Charlie Kavanagh, Bray VTOS*
- *Dominic Coll, Ballymun Men's Group / BTEI*
- *Danny O'Regan, Tipperary NTDI*
- *Kathleen Kennedy, Donegal Second Chance Education Project*
- *Kevin O'Duffy, Offaly Adult Literacy*
- *Marie Daly, Clondalkin Women's Community Education*
- *Moses Omuruyi, Asylum-seeker, ESOL*
- *Paula Mitchell, DALC, Dublin*
- *Phyllis Priestly, Third Level mature student*

Facilitator: Emer Dolphin

The meeting was opened by Chairperson Áine Hyland who welcomed the Minister and participants, and introduced the facilitator for the session, Emer Dolphin.

Minister Síle deValera gave a short speech (Appendix 1), expressing her appreciation to the Committee for organizing the Forum, and to the adult learners for taking the time to participate. She looked forward to hearing their contributions and learning directly from their experience.

The facilitator then led a brief round of introductions and explained that the adult learners had met the week before to prepare. In the preparation day, they had brainstormed the issues and experiences they wished to talk about and had grouped

these under the headings listed below, and chosen the ones they wished to speak about:

- Early experiences of education and their impact
- The importance of information
- Access and approaches to Adult and Community Education
- Support services and diversity
- Progression
- Workplace
- Funding and resources

The facilitator suggested that the first hour and a half focus on the contributions of the learners under each of these headings, to be followed by a general discussion. This was agreed.

The following is a summary of points raised by the adult learners under each of the key areas identified:

Early experiences of education and their impact:

- I had very damaging experiences of school, including severe abuse; I have memories of being ‘bullied and bet’ and told I was ‘stupid’.
- I believed I was stupid and carried that belief through life. I had very little confidence. This led to depression and drink problems and even thoughts of suicide
- I might appear outwardly confident, even aggressive but I was terrified inside that anyone would find out how ‘stupid’ I was
- I was ‘sweating with fear’ the first time I walked up the avenue to the education centre
- What made a difference was the Guidance person who met me, he understood me and I was able to talk to him
- Going back to learning has made a huge difference and given me a whole new life and lots self-confidence.

The importance of information / workplace

- I was working for 27 years. I could read well but my spelling was poor. I wanted to do something about it and was looking for information for years but couldn’t find it. I was afraid to ask anyone in work in case it would affect my job
- By chance I saw a NALA poster in a Health Centre. It took me months to pluck up courage to go to centre. I went to the door 3 times and turned back before eventually going in
- The ALO was great. I have done lots of classes and courses since. I’m now a student rep on the NALA executive
- I came from Nigeria as an asylum-seeker. I didn’t have much education. I was looking for information, but couldn’t get any. I asked my social worker but she didn’t know.
- By accident I overheard other immigrants talking about a course and I went to DALC in Mountjoy square
- Then I was moved to Offaly. Now I have to travel from Offaly to Dublin for my course and I get no money for transport. Sometimes I miss the course
- I feel strongly that more support is needed for young people – both national and non-nationals Young people with educational problems try to hide it I see this all

the time

Access and approaches to adult and community education:

- I left school early and got married. I was at home with young children when I joined my local community education group
- It was brilliant. It was so friendly and relaxed, and there was childcare. It was run by local women just like me. I did lots of courses including the Leaving Cert. Now I work there myself.
- Women's community education groups run lots of different course to suit women's needs. They are very open and flexible. We also provide childcare – this is essential for women to come back to education.

- The second chance programme I did in Donegal was brilliant and made a huge difference. The facilitators were great, they knew how to relate to us as adults.
- We had allowances for eldercare as well as childcare and transport. That made a huge difference for women living in isolated rural areas. Often care of old people is as big an issue as childcare for us
- We also did study skills at the beginning of the programme – this was a great help for those of us who had left school many years ago. We learnt how to organize ourselves, take notes, use a library.

- I was at a loose end. Didn't know what to do with myself. I did VTOS course. That was great. But it took a lot to get on it – first social welfare told me I wasn't allowed do it. Then they let me.
- I joined the men's group. It's great. It's a safe place where you can get support and talk things through. You get listened to and you can trust people.
- It's given me lots more confidence. Now I work in one of the centres.

Support services and diversity:

- I worked all my life and didn't have any problems reading and writing. Then I had a stroke when I was forty. I thought my life was over.
- I didn't know where to find any information to help me. Then by chance I met someone who told me about the guidance place and I went there
- The girls there were great. I got on a course for people with disabilities – the NTDI. I'm doing lots of computer training. It's brilliant. I joined the men's group. It's a great support for men.
- Only now because of some new rules, I can't use that centre any more. It means I have to go another place and get to know them. I think that's wrong
- I am a Traveler. I have 10 children. All of them have done well at school. The oldest ones have got their leaving cert now. I can't read and write.
- It was only chance that I got back to education. I overheard another Traveler woman talking in the hospital and I asked her
- She brought me down to the Traveler centre. I have a job there now. It's great. I've learnt loads and it's given me lots of confidence. It's made a big difference to my kids as well.

Progression:

- I had a great love of learning and did well at school, but I had to leave at 14. That was the way then. I got a job and got married and had children.
- Years later I went back to Pearse College. Then I joined the local community education group. I did the first Aontas NOW course. That was terrific. In one of the exercises I said 'I can I must and I will' go back to college

- It took a lot to find out all the information about it. I couldn't believe it when I got a place. It was hard going back at my age and all those young people.
- But I stuck at it, and now I have a degree. I couldn't have done it without the support of my local group. They were great when I thought I couldn't go on.
- I was terrified to even to go to the education centre. I had no idea what Adult Guidance meant. I thought it might be something about tax. Someone had to explain it to me.
- When I did start at the centre I found the staff great. I did lots of courses, including computers. They told me I had great communication skills. Now I've a job assisting teaching computer skills to others.
- There are projects in our area bringing parents and the community into the schools. It's very important for the younger kids to have a different role model - to see adults from their own community continuing with education.
- It's very important to have the right supports for adults to progress to further education or employment when they have come back to education.
- Getting information about progression routes is a big problem. And adults need different types of supports to progress. At our centre we are researching this.

Funding and resources:

- One of the biggest problems about funding is the uncertainty. You get it for one year and you don't know if it will continue. This makes it very difficult to plan anything properly
- We have to apply for bits and pieces of funding from lots of different places – VEC, CRAGA, Combat Poverty, local partnerships. It all takes up so much time and energy - making all the applications and then keeping track of it all.
- There should be mainstream funding for community education groups – core long-term funding for our work
- I was told that there has been no increase in VTOS funding since 1998. That's a disgrace.
- Funding for adult and community education is an investment in the future, for everyone - adults and their children and communities

Following a short break, committee members acknowledged and thanked the participants for their contributions which had given a deep insight into adult learners' direct experience and had been both humbling and enlightening – especially for teachers – to listen to.

A general discussion then took place during which the following points were highlighted:

- The benefits of participation in adult and community education:
 - Acquisition of knowledge, skill and competence and gained accreditation (literacy, numeracy, spelling, FETAC in communications and maths, ECDL, City and Guilds Diploma in Computers, Junior and Leaving Cert History and English subjects, Greek and Roman civilisation, politics)
 - Got jobs and promotions
 - Provided a healing Process
 - Increased confidence and self esteem
 - Equipped people to deal with life situations
 - Contributed to the community and helped others

- Broke inter-generational cycle educational disadvantage
 - Harnessed potential in themselves and others
 - Built connections and broke isolation
 - Learned how to learn and embraced lifelong learning
 - Provides positive role models from local communities in local communities
- The factors that make adult and community education work:
 - Provides supports - physical (childcare, transport, CE, incentives, study skills)
 - Emotional support (encouragement, advice and guidance)
 - Affords people respect and sensitivity and builds up trusting relationships.
 - Makes learning safe and fun
 - Puts learners at the centre of the process and builds provision around their needs.
 - Is flexible and has options
- Although there have been improvements and changes in Adult Education in the last 20 years, there still is not sufficient recognition, support and resources going to the area.
- Adult education is a vital part in breaking the cycle of educational disadvantage. Community and basic education are very successful models and must be recognized and resourced to a far greater extent
- Why are so many young people leaving school still with reading and writing difficulties? Educating parents and involving the local community in the school environment is essential to break the cycle of educational disadvantage for young people today. Schools and teachers need to be much more open to this. Already there are some pilot projects modeling this integration e.g. in Dublin's inner city. These should be happening in many other places.
- The school system must realise the importance of supporting students' confidence so that their self-esteem is intact when they leave school, even if the learning achieved is considered minimal.
- Adult education is still fragmented and isolated from mainstream primary, secondary and third level education. There needs to be much more integration, and mainstream schools and colleges need to be more flexible and open to learning and adopting the successful approaches of adult and community education.
- Learning should also be for its own sake – the joy, challenge and fun of learning. Sometimes we forget this.
- Schools should be telling children that learning is lifelong and is not over after they finish the traditional hierarchical route. The people who contributed to this meeting are great examples of people learning vertically and horizontally - lifelong and lifewide.

Everyone agreed that the afternoon had been informative and beneficial and it was agreed that points raised would be progressed by the Committee. Aine Hyland thanked everyone for their contribution and closed the meeting.
