

BTEI

Increasing Men's Participation in Adult Learning



Guidelines to Enhance Men's Engagement with
Back to Education Initiative Funded Programmes

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Contents

	Page
Acknowledgements	4
Section 1	
Introduction	5
Section 2	
Why Focus on Men’s Participation in BTEI?	7
Section 3	
Current Male Participation in BTEI Funded Programmes	9
Section 4	
Barriers to Participation - Responses from BTEI Providers	
• Case Study 1: Co. Meath VEC	14
• Case Study 2: Co. Clare VEC	16
• Case Study 3: City of Dublin VEC	19
• Case Study 4: Co. Wexford VEC	22
• Case Study 5: LEAP Project, Co. Wicklow	25
• Case Study 6: Co. Galway VEC	27
Section 5	
Conclusion	29
Bibliography	30

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1. INTRODUCTION

This report on men's participation in Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) (Part-Time) funded programmes is one of a series, produced in response to issues identified during the consultation process with BTEI providers that took place during 2005 and published in the discussion document circulated by the Department of Education and Science in October 2006.

The report accompanies the Guidelines for Effective Planning and Delivery of BTEI Outreach Provision, 'Widening Participation in Adult Learning' developed by the City of Limerick VEC in cooperation with the Further Education Development Unit. The guidelines on outreach offer a practical guide for practitioners wishing to engage learners who do not usually access educational provision delivered in institutional settings. They offer guidance on establishing and building educational outreach teams, motivating and involving learners and providing them with a positive and fruitful educational experience.

This report on men's participation is intended to be read in conjunction with the guidelines on outreach. It highlights the importance of men as a specific BTEI target group and presents a brief statistical analysis of their participation in BTEI provision in 2007. The report is informed by a review of existing related literature and by extensive consultation with BTEI providers and it presents a number of case studies of approaches that have successfully engaged men in BTEI provision.

The third report 'Promoting Access and Progression in Adult Learning' deals with the links between adult literacy provision and BTEI and sets out the key principles underpinning cooperation between the two programmes. Many of the issues outlined in that report are also of relevance to the participation of men in adult and further education programmes.

Other reports on the participation of people with disabilities in BTEI provision and issues relating to the attainment of certification, particularly at NFQ Levels Three and Four will be disseminated at a later stage.

Following the publication of the White Paper on Adult Education, Learning for Life (2000) the Back to Education Initiative was launched by the Department of Education and Science in 2002 to contribute to the capacity of the formal education sector to meet the changing needs of individuals, communities and society by providing accredited part-time courses, and to complement existing full-time further and adult education programmes funded by the Department. The overall aim of the Back to Education Initiative is to increase the participation of young people and adults with less than upper second level education in a range of flexible learning opportunities leading to formal qualifications on the National Framework of Qualifications, with particular emphasis on Levels Three and Four.

The BTEI discussion document published by the Further Education Development Unit in 2006 highlighted the low numbers of men participating in BTEI programmes (on average, 25% of the total cohort) and recommended the creation of best practice guidelines on effective approaches to increasing men's participation in BTEI.

This report is primarily designed to provide support to BTEI providers currently working or wishing to work in the future with, men. It will also be a useful resource for any organisation or service which aims to promote life-long learning and increase the participation of men; particularly the most disadvantaged and marginalised men.

The report was commissioned by the Department of Education and Science and was researched and written by AONTAS, the National Adult Learning Organisation.

2. WHY FOCUS ON MEN'S PARTICIPATION IN BTEI?

As with the Guidelines on Outreach, this report reflects current Irish and European policy priorities in relation to adult learning. These priorities include promotion of equality of access to and participation in, adult learning and recognition of all forms of purposeful learning. Policy also underscores the need for flexibility and responsiveness, including the provision of tailored initiatives and supports that address barriers to participation.

The White Paper on Adult Education acknowledged the contribution of community and adult education providers in formulating new and effective bottom-up educational strategies with marginalised groups and the potential contribution of these strategies in engaging “highly marginalised people” such as “disadvantaged men”¹. The Education Equality Initiative Phase 1 2000-2003 funded by the Department of Education and Science broadened the initial terms of reference of the Women’s Education Initiative to focus on both disadvantaged men and women in view of the under-representation of men in adult and community education generally. Similarly the BTEI includes disadvantaged men as one of a number of specific target groups in its terms of reference.

While at international level, there are no significant gender imbalances in participation in adult learning², in Ireland men are under-represented in the Adult and Community Education sector generally and on BTEI programmes in particular. Women substantially outnumber men in the full range of further education programmes funded by the Department of Education and Science and delivered by the VECs (O’Connor 2007)³. A 2008 report emphasises the fact that the overall participation of men in adult and continuing education remains low in Ireland and that this phenomenon continues to pose a big challenge for the Vocational Educational Committees and for the Department of Education and Science.⁴

However, O’Connor also provides data from FETAC to offer a more gender-balanced picture of certified education and training. Within the full range of FETAC awards in 2005 which includes awards offered for training through agencies such as FÁS and Teagasc, the gender ratio among award recipients was 53% female to 47% male. There are clear gender differences in the take-up of courses, with men largely confining their engagement in further

¹ White Paper on Adult Education Learning for Life (2000) P.71

² OECD, 2005, Promoting Adult Learning. The report states that (in the 17 countries surveyed) “there is little differentiation in participation by gender (...). Women are engaged in learning to a slightly higher degree than men.” In the EU-27 participation in adult learning was 9.7%, (females: 10.6%, males: 8.8%) in 2007 on a 4-week reference period (Pr release 07/08 2008b).

³ O’Connor, M. (2007) *Sé Sí: Gender in Irish Education*, Dublin Department of Education and Science. O’Connor cites the one exception as “Youthreach where the ratio is close to 50:50. However one would expect to have more boys in Youthreach, given that they outnumber girls by 2 to 1 within the target group of early school leavers.” P. 113

⁴ National Report on Lifelong Learning in Ireland, 2008

education to vocationally oriented training. Participants in apprenticeship, specific skills training and Teagasc agricultural training courses are almost exclusively male. Evidence from work-based adult basic education initiatives also confirms the involvement of a higher percentage of male participants.⁵

These data are supported by research carried out in the United Kingdom by McGivney which demonstrates similar gender imbalances in participation in post-compulsory education and training.⁶ McGivney emphasises that social class is arguably a more significant factor than gender, and that lack of educational and professional qualifications amongst men of all ages in specific social groups poses a significant barrier in relation to the labour market, but also to broader social and community participation.⁷

O'Connor concludes that in general terms men's participation in education and training appears to diminish rapidly over the life cycle (...) and that the great majority of apprentices are aged between their late teens and early twenties and most participants in specific skills training are under twenty-five.⁸ However this is true for all adults. In all the EU-27 countries participation rates decrease significantly with age and persons aged 55-64 years participate four times less than persons aged 25-34 years (from 15.5% for 25-34 to 4.6% for 55-64 year olds).⁹

The downturn in the Irish economy in 2008 has led to extensive job losses particularly in the construction industry and this has impacted heavily on low skilled workers, many of whom are men. The report of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs highlights the need for upskilling through education and training. "An additional 500,000 individuals within the workforce [need] to be up skilled"¹⁰ if Ireland is to maintain a competitive, healthy economy. Specific targets are set for those with less than upper secondary education, with 70,000 projected to advance from NFQ Levels One and Two to NFQ Level Three and a further 250,000 to progress to Levels Four and Five.

These factors demonstrate the urgency of attracting more men into continuing education and training particularly from priority target groups with low levels of education and training.

⁵ Conboy, Patricia (2002), *Evaluation of The Return to Learning Initiative*, NALA, Dublin

⁶ McGivney, V. (2004): *Men Earn, Women Learn*, NIACE, Leicester.

⁷ McGivney (2004) p.45-54

⁸ O'Connor, 2007, p. 9

⁹ European Commission (2007) *Commission Staff Working Document, Progress towards the Lisbon Objectives in Education and Training, Indicators and Benchmarks 2007* http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/doc/progress06/report_en.pdf

¹⁰ *Tomorrow's Skills: Toward a National Skills Strategy* (2007)

3. CURRENT MALE PARTICIPATION IN BTEI FUNDED PROGRAMMES

In total there were 25,860 participants in BTEI-funded programmes in 2007, of whom 77% were women and 23% were men. This represents an increase on the 2006 figure of 24,728 participants. However the male: female ratio for 2007 shows an ongoing decline in the participation rate of males (25% in 2005 and 24% in 2006), and highlights the need for specific strategies to attract men with low or no qualifications.

Age of male participants in 2007

17% of male participants were aged between 16 and 24
40% aged between 25 and 44
18% aged between 45 and 54
25% were aged over 55

Education levels of male participants in 2007

76% of male participants had less than upper secondary education and 38% had primary education only. This latter figure is significantly higher than the corresponding figure of 24% of female participants with primary education only.

Labour market status of male participants in 2007

15% of male participants were employed
31% of male participants were unemployed, of whom 13% were long-term unemployed (over 3 years)
54% were outside the labour market

The high number of men (54%) reported as being outside the labour market include those who are eligible for Training Schemes, in receipt of Disability Allowance / Illness Benefit and/or Asylum Seekers. Men with an entitlement to Disability Allowance / Illness Benefit constitute a significant number of male BTEI participants outside the labour market, as is illustrated by the fact that 30% of all social welfare entitlements/payments for BTEI male participants were in respect of Disability Allowance / Illness Benefit compared to 17% for women. This reflects overall BTEI participant data that 24% of all male participants in 2007 were in receipt of a disability payment while the overall figure was 14% for all participants, male and female.

The change in eligibility criteria for BTEI (Part-time) in 2007 which extended free tuition to all persons with less than upper secondary education may prove effective in targeting low-skilled men in employment.

Male participants by specific BTEI target group in 2007

3% of male participants were Travellers

16% of male participants were migrants participating in English language provision

24% of male participants had a disability

Certification Rates in BTEI in 2007

38% (9,847) of all participants achieved certification during 2007, representing a small increase over the figure of 37% for 2006. Of those who achieved certification, only 19% (1897) were male and only 31% of all male participants achieved certification in 2007 as compared to 40% of female participants.

Awards achieved by males and females in BTEI in 2007

Of the awards actually achieved by males and females in BTEI in 2007, the following were the levels of achievement:

FETAC Award Level	Of 1897 awards made to male participants % at levels as follows:	Of 7950 awards made to female participants % at levels as follows:
FETAC Level 3 Single Module Awards	52%	35%
FETAC Level 3 Full Awards	3%	1%
FETAC Level 4 Single Module Awards	23%	17%
FETAC Level 4 Full Awards	1%	1%
FETAC Level 5 Single Module Awards	15%	38%
FETAC Level 5 Full Awards	0.4%	5%
Junior Certificate single subject awards	0.7%	0.5%
Junior Certificate full awards	0.3%	0.3%
Leaving Certificate single subject awards	3%	1%
Leaving Certificate full awards	0.7%	0.2%
TOTAL	100% (1897)	100% (7950)

A significant number of the awards achieved by men are at Level Three, primarily for single modules (52%). While this may be deemed to correlate with the low education level on entry of the majority of male participants (76% with less than upper secondary education), it is important that provision supports the achievement of full awards at Level Three and/or progression to Level Four (only 3% of awards were for full FETAC Level Three awards, 1% for full FETAC Level Four awards).

A significant number of awards achieved by women are at Level Five (38% for single modules, 5% for full awards). This may reflect the higher education level on entry of women relative to the entry education level of men. It also suggests that programmes being offered to women are leading to certification at levels which increase skills that may meet labour market demands (for example, Childcare, Healthcare, Business Administration). To increase the levels of certification achieved by men, provision may need to include relevant supports to maximise opportunities for the achievement of certification in areas and at levels that are in line with current skills needs and that have clear employment outcomes of interest to men.

Literacy and Guidance Support

Only 4% of all participants received extra support for literacy in 2007. 5% of all men participating received literacy support (representing 30% of the total literacy support provided). This low rate of support is of concern given that 37% of male participants had achieved only primary education. 33% of all participants received guidance support in 2007 and 31% of male participants received guidance (representing 22% of the total guidance support provided).

In summary, men are significantly under represented in BTEI funded programmes and this low participation trend is intensifying. A significant percentage of those who do participate are aged over 55 and many have only minimal education. Over half of male participants are outside the labour market, reflecting the significant numbers of male learners who have a disability or who are asylum seekers. Only one-third of male participants achieved certification in 2007. A small minority received literacy support while a more significant percentage had access to guidance. The low numbers of male participants achieving awards enabling progression to higher levels of education and training is also of concern.

4. BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION AND RESPONSES FROM BTEI PROVIDERS

This section presents an overview of the existing literature relating to men's participation in adult and community education. It highlights the main barriers to their participation, as identified by this research, and provides specific case studies from current BTEI provision as examples of good practice that address these barriers.

Owens' study (2000)¹¹ identifies a four strand conceptual framework in the research literature within which the complex mix of inter-related barriers to adults' accessing and participating in, education and training are analysed. These barriers are summarised as:

- **Dispositional:** the individual's feelings, thoughts and attitudes to him/herself and to learning activities
- **Institutional:** the image, ethos, and physical environment, administrative and pedagogical practices of education and training providers
- **Informational:** the availability, range, quality and reliability of information on education and training opportunities
- **Situational:** the individual's life situation as well as the extent to which resources such as time or money influence participation. Informational and situational barriers frequently overlap.

A further 'contextual' barrier, identified by Ronayne, is noted by Owens. This relates to the prevailing labour market conditions, policy priorities and the ensuing range of targeted programmes.

Motivating Factors

Owens highlights five key positive features of educational provision identified by her research:

- Providing individual responses to individual need
- Restoring self belief and 'agency' in the learner
- Building facilitator/tutor- learner relationships on a foundation of mutual respect and trust
- Providing a non-threatening, non-competitive flexible and confidential environment
- Facilitating the acquisition of skills in a purposeful and meaningful way

Personalised learning is specifically highlighted as a means of facilitating students to identify the direction they wish to take, by setting and reviewing

¹¹Owens, T (2000), *Men on the Move: A study of barriers to male participation in education and training initiatives*, Dublin, AONTAS, p. 5-6

goals and the skills and competencies that they need to acquire to achieve their aims. The facilitation of skills and competencies is encouraged by making the programme content relevant to the everyday lives of participants and the design of learning plans that suit individual needs plans and goals. Finally, the inclusion of professional guidance is highlighted as crucial.

A 2002 report on literacy provision in the Dublin Adult Learning Centre¹² found that men's motivation for engaging with adult literacy education included personal, family and work related factors. Supports were also identified as vital if participation was to be sustained and progression from adult literacy education to be achieved.

In the context of BTEI funded provision, all of the above supply-side and demand-side barriers operate, singly or multiply, to discourage and demotivate men when it comes to making a decision to participate in a learning opportunity. Similarly, the motivating factors serve to motivate men to participate in learning opportunities. In response, a number of BTEI providers have put special initiatives in place to support men to participate in a BTEI funded programme by addressing one or more of these barriers. These initiatives are presented below as case studies relevant to each barrier.

Dispositional Barriers

For many reasons some men are very difficult to attract into a structured learning environment. Some fear the unknown or fear the formal education system, due to negative experiences the first time around. Some have poor literacy skills and may fear being exposed. Others will be suspicious, mistrusting of 'state institutions' or cynical about what second chance education can do for them.

McGivney's 2004 study highlights the barrier imposed by male culture which portrays education as a female pursuit and not fitting with a 'macho' image. Many boys, particularly from working class backgrounds, were found to view boys who applied themselves in school as effeminate and 'wimps'¹³. An Irish study, 'Young Men on the Margins'¹⁴ also examines the so called "crisis of masculinity" and the evidence for marginalisation in key areas of consequence for men, including education. It concludes that gender and socio-economic status interact quite significantly and that a particular grouping of male students, boys and young men from lower socio-economic backgrounds, can be identified as doing less well educationally. They are particularly over-represented amongst early school leavers and "there are substantial educational differentials between them and females generally as well as males from the highest socio-economic groupings."¹⁵

¹² Corridan (2002) *Moving from the Margins: A Study of Male Participation in Adult Literacy Education (2002)*

¹³ McGivney, V. (2004), P.59

¹⁴ Cleary et al, (2004) *Young Men on the Margins*, Katharine Howard Foundation

¹⁵ Cleary et al, p.35.

Corridan's study of adult literacy provision identified barriers which included negative school experiences such as physical punishment and internalising feelings of inadequacy brought on by teachers' 'put downs' or lack of interest in "no hopers"¹⁶. The use of physical punishment and the pervading sense of fear and threat featured strongly in participants' accounts of their school days. Other barriers included a strong sense of embarrassment and shame at returning to education as an adult, particularly to tackle literacy difficulties, which one man suggested was a 'taboo' subject.

The International Adult Literacy Survey while confirming that gender differences are insignificant in relation to literacy levels in all countries participating, including Ireland, highlights that literacy difficulties constitute one of the most significant dispositional barriers to participation¹⁷ in that they predispose individuals into believing that they will not succeed in adult learning.

These findings are supported by Owens who states that "lack of confidence and low self esteem are key dispositional barriers to participation in education and training"¹⁸ and "the greatest barriers to participation in education may be located deep within the self."¹⁹

In summary, the traditional view of the role of men in society as patriarch and 'breadwinner' endures. Expectations that men should be the ones to go out to work in order to provide for their families persist. Many men may not identify the benefits of formal learning, either short or long term, because they cannot reconcile it with these traditionally assigned gender roles and they may struggle to see its relevance to their own lives. These beliefs may be coupled with the perception that adult education is for women and/or that there has been a gradual feminisation of adult education in Ireland over the years.

Case Study 1 The following case study from Co. Meath VEC demonstrates how programmes with a clear vocational focus can overcome these dispositional barriers.

Co Meath VEC Responding to dispositional barriers to participation by linking the course to employment opportunities
Course Title PC maintenance and Support Skills
Target Group Unemployed men

The programme PC maintenance and Support Skills grew from an inter-agency project in Navan, in which Co. Meath VEC was involved in conjunction with RAPID, FÁS, Meath Jobs Club, the FIT (Fast Track to IT) Initiative and the

¹⁶ Corridan, M. (2002), P.13

¹⁷ Department of Education and Science, 1997, *International Adult Literacy Survey: Results for Ireland*, Stationery Office, Dublin

¹⁸ Owens, T. (2000), Pp. 7

¹⁹ Owens, T. (2000), Pp. 23

Department of Social and Family Affairs. Intensive advertising in local papers, local radio, FÁS offices, shops, parish bulletins etc, as well as postal contact by the Department of Social and Family Affairs to unemployed people in the area resulted in a very positive response and interest in tuition. A part-time programme for men in PC Maintenance and Support Skills, that included general education modules, was developed.

Participants

Twelve men enrolled on the programme and eight completed it. Four men left the course due to personal problems and illness and one gained employment.

Learning provision

A team of tutors delivered a range of integrated FETAC modules including Communications, Maths, Personal Effectiveness, Consumer Awareness, Preparation for Work and Information Technology skills. An experienced tutor delivered the FIT module in PC maintenance. The general education modules were delivered on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays. The maintenance module was delivered on Thursday, over the entire six months of the course, as it was decided that if this module were to be delivered earlier in the week or finished early on in the programme there could be a major fall-off in attendance. FIT supported the programme by organising work experience, mock interviews and PC Maintenance manuals and providing used PCs for rebuilding. A bonus was that the men were allowed to keep the rebuilt PCs. The men initially expressed opposition to participation in general education modules, but as their confidence increased their participation improved. Regular meetings were held between students and tutors to discuss progress, address problems and make adjustments.

Learning outcomes

Six men received full FETAC Level Three certificates while two others received five component Level Three certificates.

All of the men gained confidence and increased self-esteem and participated in work experience and one obtained a short-term contract as a result. The skills gained meant these men could be employed as PC maintenance operatives in factories, offices and schools. They also had sufficient skills to work in retail outlets that sold or serviced PCs or to set up a home-based business for themselves.

Quote from participant

"I was very nervous about starting this course as I didn't think I would be able for some of the subjects. Now that I'm finished I am delighted with myself. It was great to have somewhere to come and meet other men and the tutors were great. They had plenty of time for everyone. It was great that we got to keep the computers."

Institutional Barriers

Institutional barriers may arise from realities and perceptions in relation to local image, access policies, costs, physical environment, learning options, pedagogical practices, learning supports, learning outcomes and progression opportunities of an education and training provider. It is in the hands of providers to address these challenges and work to maximise efforts together with other service providers who have good contact and credibility with the target group and/or more appropriate location/services. The Guidelines on Outreach address this issue in more detail.

The Education Equality Initiative supported pilot projects to generate policy and practice lessons in relation to addressing educational disadvantage, including the needs of educationally disadvantaged and rurally isolated men. The major policy lesson arising from the first phase of the Education Equality Initiative was that an integrated services approach at national and local levels is the only effective way to address educational disadvantage. The projects demonstrated that the so called 'hard to reach' in educational terms "are indeed hard to reach or to put it another way, they find existing adult education and training services 'hard to reach'. However, educationally disadvantaged people respond positively to an approach involving service providers working together to provide integrated learning opportunities and supports".²⁰ Such supports include guidance, childcare, transport, skilled tutors, resource materials and administrative back-up.

Case Study 2 The following case study from Co. Clare VEC demonstrates how strong collaborative approaches and strategic partnerships can address such institutional barriers.

Co. Clare VEC	Responding to institutional barriers through an integrated services approach
Course Title	Multi-Skills Course - North/West Clare
Target Group	Rural/Isolated Farmers from North/West Clare

Co. Clare VEC worked in partnership with Eirí Corca Baiscinn, a local Community Development Project, FÁS, Teagasc and the Health Service Executive. As the sponsoring body Eirí Corca Baiscinn took the lead role with responsibilities for organising the course, sourcing tutors, providing training, facilities and coordination. The Clare Cohesion Process through the North Clare Farm Family Support Service sponsored the North Clare participants on the course. An important factor was the training allowance provided which give the trainees an initial incentive.

²⁰ Department of Education and Science, 2005. *Education Equality Initiative Phase 1: Policy and Practice Lessons*

Participants

A total of 20 participants started the course 19 male and 1 female. Twelve of these were from the north Clare area, all from a farming background and ranging in age from early 30s to mid-50s. Their educational background was mixed, varying from those who had left school at primary level to one man who held a diploma. All had spent most of their working lives farming and expressed an interest in learning new skills with a view to increasing their incomes. Their attendance and the fact that they were happy to study outside course times indicated their commitment and interest in the course.

Course objectives

The multi-skills training course was devised to provide farmers with the opportunity of developing new skills and improving their existing ones. The specific objectives of the course were:

- a) To help farmers up-skill
- b) To prepare farmers for off-farm employment options
- c) To help farmers develop new business opportunities on-farm
- d) To highlight their own capabilities to farmers

Learning option

With these objectives in mind the programme was organised to deliver a series of training modules over a six month period from October to March. Participants received 20 hours training per week on a variety of modules. The modules included Woodwork, Horticulture, Welding, Starting Your Own Business, Preparation for Work, Information Technology, Hoof Paring, Renewable Energy, Farm Safety, Safe Pass, Cookery and Work Experience.

The 20 people on the group interacted well and built good working relationships with each other and the tutors on the various modules. Throughout the course they commented on how isolated it could be working on a farm particularly during winter, and that the course had given them opportunity to get out, meet others and learn new skills. At certain times team working was very important, particularly in areas such as horticulture and woodwork where people joined in and helped each other. This was evident when they were finishing their woodwork items, as they had to really help each other out to get them finished on time. The various tutors enjoyed working with the group and were able to build rapport with the individuals on the course. All trainees stressed the importance of their relationship with the tutors to their learning and also when a module was well-structured and outcomes were clear.

A significant success factor was that the participants were free to nominate modules that they would like to have included in the course. Another important aspect was the relationship between organisers and training providers and getting all concerned involved and committed. Problems

relating to the course tended to revolve around the timetable and participants' other commitments. At times there was a feeling that modules were being rushed, particularly when the trainees had to produce evidence for certification. Conversely, they experienced first hand the realities of working to tight deadlines.

Learning outcomes

Three members of the group are now working on a part time basis with their work experience employer, and two others plan to do so. Two are in the process of starting their own business. All parties, especially the trainees, were satisfied that the initial aims of the course were achieved.

The Education Equality Initiative's conclusion regarding the importance of an integrated service approach is confirmed by Kelleher and Associates' study *Uncertain Futures: An Exploratory Study of Men at the Margins* (2007) which concludes that many young men in their early to mid twenties are marooned, outside mainstream culture, but are ready to engage with projects and services. "However the challenge is for agencies to cooperate to deliver comprehensive, integrated, respectful specialist and mainstream responses to the needs of these young men." ²¹

The researchers interviewed a group of young men aged 18 - 33 about their experiences of social marginalisation in Limerick city. The study identifies their disaffection from the school environment and school culture from an early age, subsequently consolidated by their experience of secondary school. All of the men interviewed left school early without a qualification, many with literacy difficulties. The experience of attending community training workshops was far more positive and the research underlines the need for "education projects that are person-centred have small classes and where a relational, informal approach to learning is adopted."²² Local community-based projects outside formal institutional settings supported a number of these men to engage with education and training activities the second time around and challenged their negative perceptions of the traditional learning environment.

In this context, Owens' research suggests that the use of the phrase 'back to education' in the promotion of the concept of lifelong learning may act as a deterrent to some potential learners.

Case Study 3 Responding to institutional barriers to participation through providing an attractive, relevant work-related learning option

²¹ Kelleher Associates and Pat O'Connor (2007), p. 39

²² Kelleher Associates & P. O'Connor (2007), p. 37

City of Dublin VEC

Overcoming institutional barriers by providing skills based provision clearly linked to improving employment prospects
Back to Education Pre-apprenticeship Course

Course Title**Target Group**

Young early school leaver males aged 16 - 24

The St. Kevin's College Back to Education Pre-Apprenticeship course was developed as a result of discussions between Youthreach Basin Lane (now Youthreach Crumlin) and St. Kevin's College regarding an education gap within the Crumlin area. The local Partnership (KWCDT) was involved from the outset in advising on and supporting this project.

The course is for people interested in pursuing education to bring them up to a level of employability, especially within the construction industry. Whilst Youthreach provided education for early school leavers and Post Leaving Certificate courses in the area provided education at FETAC Level Five, a gap existed at Level Four. Although in theory an apprenticeship can be gained with Level Three education, such as that provided by Youthreach, in reality in a competitive environment employers usually ask for at least a Level Four qualification for entry to an apprenticeship in the construction industry.

Some learners receive a training allowance based on age and attendance, which acts as an incentive to participate, as well as helping to develop a work-place mentality. The allowance is available for those aged 16-20 years under the BTEI pro-rata Youthreach allowance scheme. However those over 18 normally elect to sign on the Live Register instead.

Target group

There were two main target groups for this course. Early school leavers represented a large part of those recruited, either by referral following a successful period in Youthreach Crumlin, or Youthreach Pleasant's Street, by referral from other local youth projects such as the John Bosco, or directly after leaving school. The second group consists of adults who may feel they missed out on education whilst in school and wish to up-skill themselves in order to qualify for an apprenticeship. This group are recruited for the course through advertising at college open days, other local information activities and the distribution of information in the local Social Welfare Office.

Whilst females are more than welcome to join the course, in practice we find that the nature of apprenticeship training in the construction industry usually has a greater appeal to males, and consequently the vast majority of participants are male.

Learning option

It is our experience that very often those leaving school early do not have an academic orientation, and may find sitting in a theory-based atmosphere

for long periods difficult. The practical aspects of a pre-apprenticeship course often have a better fit than a school/college environment for such learners, who often learn more easily and retain information better when they are doing something physically, rather than listening to a tutor talking, or reading a text. The course is part time (three full days per week) which facilitates other commitments, either in part time work or with family.

Personal development and pastoral support are one key element of the success of this programme. Much emphasis is placed in the initial phase on teambuilding, with the group dynamic and peer bonding being seen as the key to retaining students. Activities such as go-karting, rock climbing and other adventure sports form a core part of this process, and go hand-in-hand with a personal development course which emphasises the development of a positive self image. As part of this work much class time is taken up with re-defining how young men see their own role in their family and community and to offer a positive image of masculinity with responsibility, emotional engagement with others and productive work life as goals. Significant time is also spent 'checking in' with learners individually to look at how the course is going for them, and where they might work to help themselves.

There is a significant period of work experience and a careers information course which is constantly challenging students to think of themselves in the workplace, and make steps to getting there. These elements of the pre-apprenticeship course encourage students to think of the course as a support system for getting them what they want- namely a job.

Learning outcomes

A key factor in success is retaining a constant focus on outcomes. Learners are reminded at every opportunity that this course exists to promote their chances in work, and in obtaining an apprenticeship. Currently successful students receive a FAS certified pre-apprenticeship qualification at NFQ Level Four (equivalent to a full Leaving Certificate Applied), together with stand alone FETAC modules in Communications, Personal Development and Careers Information. As of next year it is likely that this combined approach will be rationalised into a full FETAC qualification at Level Four. As a result of this course the main career direction taken by those leaving is into the construction industry, with leavers in the last three years choosing apprenticeships in plumbing, electrics, carpentry, joinery, brick laying and metal fabrication. We have made efforts in the last year to develop links with the Army as a potential employer and sponsor for the realisation of apprenticeships, and one student from this year's class is currently engaging in this process. We also acknowledge, however, that students do change their minds during the year and that some students need to be supported in choosing careers outside the apprenticeship system. Students recently have opted for such diverse fields as furniture delivery, training as a personal fitness instructor, reception work

and retail and some have gone on to take full Leaving Certificate courses with a view to university entrance.

Challenges

In our experience, attendance is the largest single issue when dealing with this client group. Whilst generally successful in retaining students, the work of maintaining attendance is ongoing and requires constant vigilance. Chaotic lives, histories with drugs and alcohol, a pattern of disengagement from education and other social and family problems are commonplace amongst clients. In a client group which is almost exclusively males aged 16-24 it is striking that almost none has available fathers, or positive male role models. Through experience we have found that a mixture of ages of learners can be helpful in obtaining positive outcomes, with older, adult learners who have more life experience providing a calming and maturing influence on younger learners.

Whilst the course originally started as a joint programme run between two centres, it became clear that students found it difficult to attend a second centre as it took them out of a comfort zone, and into an unfamiliar space. Consequently attendance was not as good in the second centre and a decision was made to move the whole course into just one centre as of the 2007/2008 year. Attendance has improved as a result.

Case Study 4 Responding to institutional barriers by upskilling tutors

McGivney suggests that some of the most useful insights and ideas on engaging men come not from post-compulsory education but from other sectors such as health, youth work, family services and early years education where there has been a strong push on including men. These approaches include a positive organisational and management led commitment to including men, with “solid preparation”. The report Fathers Direct (2003) makes the important point that the essential first stage in any strategy to involve men is not the devising of recruitment measures, but having an explicit policy, backed up by action, on working with them and ensuring that the organisational environment, its activities and working practices are as appropriate for men as they are for women.

“There is no point in trying to recruit men if you have no idea who they are or why you want to work with them; or bringing them into an alienating environment to be met by unconvinced, uncommitted or unconfident staff. For recruitment strategies to bear fruit, preparation must be solid.”²³

The importance of the ‘right’ tutors in attracting men to adult learning cannot be underestimated. The right tutor will have the relevant qualifications, along with a level of practical work experience and relevant personality traits.

²³ Fathers Direct (2003) *Fathers and Families: A Public Consultation Concerning Developing National Standards for Father-friendly Services*. Newcastle, Fathers Direct.

Good tutors need an understanding of and expertise in specific approaches in, working with adults, as well as expertise in their specific subject matter. They should value the importance of the process of learning as well as the end result of certification and progression. McGivney states that opinion is divided on the need for male staff,²⁴ but emphasises that in strongly feminised learning sectors, the presence of some male staff can help offset the perception that programmes are aimed only or mainly at women. Some men may also identify more easily with male tutors during early engagement or for certain subjects (e.g. Personal Development).

Tutors will also need to be creative in their ways of working; drawing on their own competencies and skills as a tutor while enabling the men to learn at their own pace, in ways which are comfortable but beneficial for them.

Co Wexford VEC

Strong organisational approaches to the recruitment of male tutors

Title

The ENGAGE Programme

Target Group

Men who wish to further their interest in, or become professionally involved in the community education area, with the intention of becoming qualified as adult tutors, group facilitators, community development workers and outreach or project workers.

It has been clearly recognized that men affected by disadvantage are significantly less likely to become involved in second chance education as adults. Evidence local to Co. Wexford backs up this claim. Since 2004 the relevant service providers in Co. Wexford have been working innovatively to attend to this imbalance with a relatively high degree of success.

The ENGAGE Programme steering group is led by Co. Wexford VEC in partnership with FÁS, County Wexford Partnership, New Ross Community Development Project and Ferns Diocesan Youth Service. The ENGAGE steering group feel that it is quite possible to get a considerable percentage of any male target group involved in projects if such projects are delivered through a specific approach. One of the keys to this approach is the opinion that marginalised or socially excluded men are more likely to become involved in a project/course if there is at least one male worker on board. The programme has had significant success – e.g. New Ross CDP had up to 160 men involved in a men's work project from May 2005 until May 2006. Co. Wexford Partnership moved from having two Traveller Men involved at the beginning of April 2006 to having six Traveller men's groups, with waiting lists, county wide by November 2007. This is clear evidence that the old adage the "it is very difficult to get men involved" is not always true. The corner stone of the

²⁴ McGivney, 2004, p. 115

ENGAGE programme is built on the fact that men are more likely to respond to male workers who understand where they are coming from and have respect and empathy for any target group member.

Course aim

To train participants to a professional level as adult tutors, community development workers and outreach or project workers.

The objectives are to equip learners with the skills, knowledge and competence to engage and work with marginalised or socially excluded men. There are four elements as follows:

- i) The values underpinning the work: anti-oppressive action, equality, respect, unconditional positive regard.
- ii) Gender and social issues and their effects on men – applied masculinities.
- iii) Key skills and competencies in working and engaging with men – specific approaches
- iv) Identifying issues and responses, e.g. needs analysis, referrals

The course includes 10 FETAC Modules at Levels Five and Six leading to three clear academic outcomes:

- i) FETAC Level Five Major Award in Community Development.
- ii) Co. Wexford VEC ENGAGE programme certificate, (i.e. Major Award at Level Five plus two modules at Level Six and two locally developed modules, which are not yet accredited by FETAC.)
- iii) An agreed route onto Waterford Institute of Technology's Higher Certificate in Community Education and Development via an accredited prior learning route.

The approach which is being conveyed to the participants is simple; respect men, meet them where they are at, develop trusting relationships and help them to begin helping themselves as they see fit. The participants are facilitated to examine this approach in great detail and bring what fits of their personality and experience to enhance their collection of skills.

To date there has been an excellent attendance (87%) with the number of original applicants far outnumbering the places available. This is further evidence that the chosen approach is successful.

It is the practical application of the learning rather than the acquisition of theory which is the focus of the programme. The reflection of the integration of such learning and personal development is a priority of the learners throughout the programme.

Learning outcomes

Six of the course participants have already obtained employment in the area, albeit part-time, with local service providers. Local providers also contact the ENGAGE Programme providers when they are recruiting for positions such as project workers, development workers or adult tutors. By the completion of the programme it is envisaged that graduates will have opportunities to work with the Adult and Community Education Service of Co. Wexford VEC.

Quotes from participants

"The Engage course is less threatening than it sounds, even though it is an all men's course; it does what it says, through helping one to get within oneself and find solutions through debate."

"The ENGAGE Programme so far has opened my eyes on what really is happening in our communities and the importance of the programme. I am very relaxed but none the less take it very seriously."

Situational and Informational Barriers

Situational barriers and informational barriers frequently overlap. Situational barriers refer to an individual's life situation as well as the extent to which resources such as time or money influence participation. Informational barriers refer to the availability, range, quality and reliability of information on education and training opportunities.

The inaccessible nature of information about adult literacy education and the cost of participation were cited as barriers in the 2002 report on male participation in literacy provision in the Dublin Adult Learning Centre. Research participants pointed to inadequate and inappropriate information concerning provision and written publicity material being of limited value in promoting a service to a target group with reading difficulties. Vague course titles and lack of information about precise course content were also deemed to be off-putting. Failure to portray progression routes was also suggested as a deterrent to prospective students wishing to work towards specific goals.²⁵ The need for clear and accurate information and clear guidance to facilitate appropriate choice of courses was also highlighted.

Unemployed participants in the DALC study²⁶ cited confusion in relation to social welfare entitlements as the most serious barrier affecting their participation. They were extremely concerned that participation in

²⁵ Corridan, M. (2002) p. 20

²⁶ Corridan, M. p. 21

education would render them ineligible for payment, as they might be deemed unavailable for work. This fear was fuelled by lack of clarity about the implications of participation in education for social welfare recipients. The findings concur with previous research in the United Kingdom and in Ireland.²⁷ The study concludes that while fear of loss of benefit is very real, it is difficult to establish the extent to which this fear is warranted in terms of actual loss of benefits as a result of participation in education. What did emerge from the research however was the extent of confusion about the impact of participation on benefit entitlement.

The Mevagh Men's project, funded through the Educational Equality Initiative 2000 - 2006, set out to reach out to isolated disadvantaged men living in the parish of Mevagh on the north coast of Co. Donegal. The group was described as "extremely marginalised, due to a range of factors including age, rural isolation, lack of self-esteem and poverty."²⁸ Using a 'neighbourhood' outreach approach of information giving and one-to-one support which aims to build trust and confidence and to encourage the individual to engage with the outside community, the project identified specific life situation issues which were militating against the target group engaging with existing education and training services. These issues included lack of public transport and the extreme rural isolation of their homes, health and addiction issues as well as low motivation due to low self-esteem and poor literacy. The evaluation report on the project concludes that the neighbourhood work approach enabled the most marginalised and isolated to be reached, and constituted a sustainable approach to community development in that its impact was likely to be more long-term. However the evaluation also highlighted the fact that progress was slow and needed sustained input over a long period of time to be effective.

Confronting situational and information barriers requires an investment of time, energy and resources to alleviate fears, allay suspicions and build trust.

Case Study 5 Responding to situational and informational barriers through outreach work

Leap Project, Bray, Co. Wicklow (BTEI Community Strand)

Target Group Traveller men and drug dependent men in Bray and the surrounding area

We felt there was a need to conduct a "census" type exercise to ascertain numbers in the target group and to make personal contact, even if they

²⁷ McGivney, V., 1992 *Motivating Unemployed Adults to Undertake Education and Training*, NIACE Leicester, and European Social Fund Programme Evaluation Unit.

²⁸ Hainsworth, M., *Men's Education Initiative: Evaluation Report, 2006*, Mevagh Family Resource Centre.

chose not to engage with the project in any formal way. This then developed into a needs analysis of health, education and general welfare supports.

This outreach work has changed over time and now concentrates on the provision of information in relation to course start dates and on-going contact with individuals and families, especially those not linked into the formal provision.

One of the key elements of the work is the length of time needed to gain trust and build up relationships with this particular group. As the group was spread over a wide geographical area there was a need to visit directly. It also allows us to speak to people on their own - not in a group setting – as they may be more forthcoming about their own issues, e.g. condition of accommodation / own health issues / issues regarding children etc. than if in a group setting, especially at the beginning of the project. A very high number of visits were conducted – in the initial stages of the project over 1000 – this had decreased by 2007 to approximately 400.

Target group

98 Traveller men, over 25, were identified by outreach initially in 2001 and this has now expanded to 130. Of these 107 engaged with the project activities (not just BTEI) in 2006.

Success factors

Key success factors include:

- Regular engagement to build trust and decrease suspicion of “education” and formal projects
- Provision of a range of activities - socialization activities such as the Big Breakfast, snooker, photography classes that may attract different people and lead to them taking part in more formal provision
- Identification of “leaders” within the community / particular families that others look up to and will follow into the project and / or into formal education
- Provision of out-of-pocket expenses to cover transport etc. to course location
- Agreement with Department of Social and Family Affairs prior to courses starting that social welfare payments would not be affected by course participation (D/SFA also provided resources to cover out of pocket allowance)
- Provision of information / advocacy on range of issues - so that course engagement meant other supports were also accessed thus providing a very holistic service

Obstacles to success

- Moving too quickly to progress people into “formal” type education when they are very far from that stage - we very seriously underestimated the time needed to move from pre-development to development stage with the Project. This means people get “lost” to courses as they are perceived as too daunting.

Case Study 6

Addressing situational and informational barriers through providing learning options with a clear vocational focus that engage and retain male participants

Emphasising the positive link between education and training activities and employment can be effective when recruiting men. King and O’Driscoll’s 2002 study on gender and learning²⁹ found that women are more prepared to explore wider learning options than men who are more likely to return to learning if it is vocationally oriented and promises to assist their employment and career prospects. However, this has been challenged in a study by McGivney (2004) which cites the NIACE 2002 participation study showing that motivation for learning is “*surprisingly gender free*”³⁰. Age may be an influencing factor, with work related reasons for learning more important among younger adults and personal interest and self development reasons becoming increasingly important as individuals get older. Kelleher and Associates’ study also stresses the study group’s realisation that they need qualifications and skills to get a decent job to support their families as a motivating factor for returning to education.

The following case study from Co. Galway VEC illustrates a positive management commitment to recruiting men, with the development of provision clearly focused on local employment opportunities, designed to overcome motivational difficulties.

Co. Galway VEC

Addressing situational and informational barriers through providing a work-related course relevant to the local context

Target Group

Training needs of those involved in the fish industry

Co Galway VEC offers a programme in aquaculture at FETAC Level Five through BTEI. The programme was initially piloted in Rosmuc in 2001 as a direct response to the training needs in the area, with a specific focus on men. Some participants have completed the full award and others individual

²⁹ King, P. and O’Driscoll, S., (2002) *Gender and Learning: A Study of the Learning Styles of Women and Men and their Implications for Further Education and Training*, Shannon Curriculum Development Centre

³⁰ McGivney, V. (2004), Pp. 34

modules. The programme was a partnership between Bord Iascaigh Mhara personnel (marine biologists), Co Galway VEC personnel (educationalists) and Údarás na Gaeltachta. A steering group comprised of representatives from the three organisations oversaw the programme. Údarás na Gaeltachta paid towards tuition costs of a number of modules, as did Bord Iascaigh Mhara. BIM also paid a training allowance to participants who were unemployed.

Learning option

Programmes at Level Three and Level Four were developed initially as a lead in to Level Five and delivered initially as a two-day block-release programme for workers on fish farms. A number of modules were devised including Fish Production, On-growing Fish principles, Workboat Handling, Safety at Sea, Work Experience, Communications, Marine Engine Operations and I.T. Small inshore fishermen who were not working on fish farms but fishing locally also participated in the programme – they took a number of modules from Boat Handling to Safety at Sea. The programme offered recognition for prior learning through its Work Experience Module - trainees on the farms were given up to 80% credit for work in comparison to new entrants without experience.

The programme was also available to those interested in a career in Aquaculture although not working in the industry. The programme was linked to third level via GMIT in 2002 and is now also offered in Castletownbere in Co Cork. A three-day programme provided by BIM in coastal areas is also offered as a requirement for a 'Safe Pass' type ticket. As a direct result of the Aquaculture Programme in Rosmuc one trainee went on to develop seaweed products – Rí na Mara - which are available internationally. The brand has won numerous awards.

5. CONCLUSION

The research and case studies presented raise a number of common themes in relation to the challenges facing men wishing to access education and training opportunities, particularly those from certain socio-economic backgrounds. These challenges include overcoming negative memories of school experiences, going against traditional stereotypes of men as the 'breadwinner' or too 'macho' to engage in pursuits which are seen to be effeminate, as well as financial barriers to participation. The research also identifies trends in the motivating factors which spur men on to return to learning. These include the desire to improve their job prospects and advance their careers, and to keep up with their children's educational development. The literature reviewed above also outlines recommendations for service providers to ensure men's sustained participation in adult education activities and training. These recommendations also emphasise access to supports such as guidance and peer support, and tailoring activities to the specific needs and interests of each group of men. Most significant perhaps is the identification of the need for a positive organisational and management-led commitment to the inclusion of men, with explicit policies backed up by action.

These findings are strongly corroborated by the consultations undertaken with BTEI providers during the course of this project.

The case studies illustrate how providers have addressed the barriers that inhibit men from participating in adult learning programmes and set in place motivating frameworks to engage and retain male learners. While there is no single definitive model for engaging men in learning, evidence from research, borne out by the case studies included in this report, demonstrates that men can be attracted to appropriately targeted and presented programmes based on a realistic understanding of their needs and dominant interests. Programmes with a clear vocational focus, targeting local employment opportunities in both rural and urban contexts, have been shown to attract higher numbers of male participants than standard provision. The change in eligibility criteria for BTEI, extending free tuition to all those with less than upper secondary education, also facilitates a clear focus on low-skilled men in employment. The case studies demonstrate that the integration of basic or key skills along with work experience into courses produces positive outcomes. Personal development and professional guidance are also key elements of successful programmes and a clear emphasis on appropriate certification options helps to maintain participants' motivation.

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