



The Adult Learner

The Journal of Adult and Community Education in Ireland 2004

ADULT EDUCATION: WHERE ARE WE NOW?

THE ADULT LEARNER 2004

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2004

*This issue is dedicated to the memory of Tony Downes, former colleague and friend,
who was a member of the Editorial Board and has been a regular contributor to
The Adult Learner since 1985.*

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Contents

- 7 Editorial Comment
- 9 The State of Adult Education
TED FLEMING
- 18 Adult Education in Ireland: The implications of developments at
European Union level
HELEN KEOGH
- 27 Swimming with the (main) stream ? The relationship of adult
education and the lifelong learning agenda in post-devolution UK
MARIA SLOWEY
- 42 Planning for the future of the Adult Education Service: A challenge
for VECs
LUCAS Ó MUIRCHARTAIGH
- 56 Adult Education and the Irish Economy
SEXTON CAHILL
- 61 VTOS and BTEI: The local Adult Education Service moves
towards maturity
SEAN CONLAN
- 68 Accreditation within Adult Education: Reflections and views of
local tutors
DEIRDRE KEYES
- 78 Adult Literacy Then and Now: An ALO's Perspective
GRETVA VAUGHAN
- Book Reviews
- 85 *Gender and Learning*
*A study of the learning styles of women and men and their implications for further
education and training*
- 90 *Adults Learning*

Editorial Comment

Those who worked in adult education during the cash starved period from the late 1970s to the mid 1990s always believed that an injection of capital would help move the adult education sector in from the margins of the Irish education system. Then in 1997 the ‘Celtic tiger’ began to roar and finally the money started to flow. We wondered if the time had come when we could move in from the margins. The publication of the White Paper on Adult Education in 2000 seemed to mark a turning point. Consultation had taken place, debate had been entered into. Finally, it looked like we were about to move away from the ‘ad hoc’ of the past into a new, more coherent and sustainable system.

The period 1997 to 2002 was characterised by significant growth and development. Everyone was so busy ‘doing’ that they hardly had time to think about what it was they were doing. Then the ‘tiger’ began to falter and the roar became a whisper. Adult education providers began to experience change as their services began to stagnate with the gains of previous years beginning to be eroded. In the midst of such turbulence it seems a good time to reflect on where we are in adult education and where we are going in the years ahead. Hence, the theme of this issue is Adult Education: Where are we now?

The two Reports on Adult Education (Murphy, 1973; Kenny, 1983) and the subsequent White Paper (2000) proffer a view of adult education as contributing to people’s development as individuals, enabling them to reach their full potential, participating in their own communities and playing an active role in shaping society. It is this kind of vision which has sustained adult educators over the years. There is no doubt that there have been significant developments and improvements, particularly since the late 1990s. When we look at the adult education landscape today we see a series of programmes and initiatives which have improved the service at local level and changed the lives of many people.

Yet, when we look more closely we see a provision dominated by an economic imperative and a service driven by labour market demands. One wonders whether the kind of adult education service we see emerging today can sustain a 'Learning for Life' as well as a 'Learning for work' agenda?

The articles in this issue look at the shape of adult education in Ireland and ask some searching questions about where the future will take us. Are we swimming with the (main) stream and growing to maturity? Have we found our niche or have we lost our way? Are we strong enough to hold on to the philosophies that we hold dear or will they be swept away by the demands for accreditation and fiscal accountability? The contributors look at these questions in a series of articles which examine the state of adult education and the challenges at national and local level, explore the demands and implications of European developments and look at the manifestations of these tensions in a UK context. We know where we are and how we got here, but the big question now is do we know where we are going?

I would like to thank the contributors to this edition and the members of the Editorial Board for their assistance. In particular, I would like to thank Liam Bane, our former editor, for his dedicated service and sustained commitment to the Adult Learner since 1985 and for the contribution which he made to the record of adult education in this country. Míle buíochas.

Finally, on behalf of all of us involved in the field of adult education I would like to acknowledge the contribution of the late Tony Downes to The Adult Learner. His enthusiasm for and interest in all aspects of adult education was infectious and helped to sustain and motivate us all. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a h-anam.

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The State of Adult Education

TED FLEMING

Introduction

In the novel *The Plague* (Camus, 1960) the city of Oran is ravaged by a plague. Tarrou had just reflected on how each one of us “has the plague within” (p. 207). It is wearying to be plague-stricken, he says, and this is why “everybody in the world to-day looks so tired; everyone is more or less sick of plague” (p. 207).

All I maintain is that on this earth there are pestilences and there are victims, and it’s up to us, so far as possible, not to join forces with the pestilences. (Camus, 1960, p. 207)

I see pestilences, as I think Camus does, as a metaphor for what is happening in the world. It is difficult to make any comment about our world without referring to Iraq, the mistreatment of prisoners, the motivation of the United States in being there especially having found no weapons of mass destruction. There are pestilences nearer home too – persistent poverty, scandals and corruption.

What has this to do with adult education? It has to do with the role of adult education in a democratic society; with what we mean by adult learning and what we teach as adult educators. How to be an active and critical citizen has to be learned.

I want to look at the state of adult education in Ireland. I am suggesting that the state here means both the condition in which we now find adult education and the role of the Irish State in adult education. I will briefly outline

- some recent developments in adult education;

- make some critical comments on the state of adult education;
- look at the links between the State and the economy and civil society that have important implications for adult education.

Adult Education: Recent Developments

Following the appointment of Adult Education Organisers at the end of the 1970s adult education began to slowly grow and develop. The Murphy Report (Murphy, 1973), the Kenny Report (Kenny, 1983) and more recently the Green Paper (DES, 1998) and White Paper (DES, 2000) all set a more systematic developmental path for adult education. The development of AONTAS and NALA as national organisations contributed significantly to the way adult education has developed.

The Government is committed to a major investment in adult education as part of the *National Development Plan 2000 to 2006* (Government of Ireland, 1999). People's skills, knowledge and understanding require regular updating and learning throughout life is necessary to ensure employability, personal fulfilment, inclusion in society and active citizenship. The importance of Lifelong Learning is now established. This government rhetoric fits well with adult educators. Or so it seems.

Funding for literacy and community education has been growing since the 1980s but it still remains a modest response in the context of the total education budget. The appointment of Adult Literacy Organisers and of Community Education Facilitators are welcome and important developments. They will go some way toward providing a significant catalyst for the further development of literacy and community education that has been systematically neglected. Any cutbacks in these areas will be seen as promises broken and damage will be done by the on again/off again funding under the pretence that there is a shortfall in public finances.

Second chance education has a number of important and innovative programmes: Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS), the Education Equality Initiative (EEI), funding of Senior Traveller Training Centres, the Adult Education Guidance Initiative and Back to Education Initiative.

The BTEI, launched in 2002, has been the most important development in more recent years and is universally seen as an innovative programme that

assists adults who left school early, and others, to return to education with subsidised fees. It allows learners combine work and family with a return to learning while retaining Social Welfare entitlements. Its priority is the one million adults with less than upper second level education.

Adult education has gradually moved from being a field in which there were few facilities to where there are a number of adult education centres. It is difficult to over emphasise the importance of having clearly defined places in which adults can learn. If one wishes to go to school, primary or secondary, or go to university, there are identifiable places where these opportunities can be found. Unfortunately, it is still difficult to identify the place to which one can go to find ones lifelong learning opportunities. The school is here; the social welfare office is there; where is the adult education centre? Dedicated adult education centres would structurally and clearly identify the importance of adult education in our society.

Since its launch in 1999 twenty-five Adult Guidance Services have begun to deliver guidance to those participating in Adult and Community Education, as well as those in Literacy. They are responsible for helping those who have returned to education as adults to overcome obstacles they may encounter.

The Community Employment Scheme has allowed a large number of people engage in training and adult education courses of their own choice. The Partnership companies with Education Coordinators have been a major contributor to the development of adult education interventions in disadvantaged areas.

There has also been the development of a body of research in the field generating knowledge and reports about such topics as early school leaving, rural development, asylum seekers, access to higher education, men's groups, etc. There is now a body of research and experienced researchers contributing to our understanding of the field and supporting public policy.

Universities and colleges now have graduates in adult education from certificate to doctoral degree and this is an important indicator of the professional development of the field. At the entry level to higher education access courses, that now deliver access, are changing the age profile of the student body and there is a commitment to bring the mature student numbers to 15%.

This is admittedly a very positive and partial presentation of some recent developments. I wanted to paint this positive picture as a backdrop for some issues and problems that remain to be addressed.

The State of Adult Education

Progress appears to be remarkable mostly because development started from a very low base. That VTOS survived for almost fifteen years is worth noting. The more important question is whether VTOS (in a country with historically low levels of unemployment) will continue to find a place in the new developments or will it be left to wither on the vine so to speak?

The new kid on the block – BTEI – has bureaucratic and administrative demands that tend to absorb too much time and energy at delivery level. Reporting procedures and form filling are overly structured and onerous and there is unclarity about the systems for drawing down funding. There is a concern with administrative and bureaucratic aspects of the programme that seem to have little to do with improving the experience of students and more to do with satisfying an insatiable bureaucratic system.

Síle De Valera, Minister of State for Education and Science at the recent Aontas Community Education Conference explained how it is not sufficient for adult educators seeking funding to assert the *worthwhile nature of the proposed programme*;

there needs to be accountability for that money and an end result, not just a process. It is becoming increasingly obvious that, if education sectors and initiatives within them are to continue to attract and grow their funding, outcomes must be documented in terms of the objectives achieved and the concrete gains for the participants. That means that high quality and detailed participant data have to be produced at the start of the programme, ...and at the finish. Funding of a project cannot be solely justified on the worthiness of the client group.

There is competition for scarce resources not only in adult education but between primary, secondary and higher education, the Minister continues. In order to access funds, the agencies and groups seeking funding need to have persuasive cases backed by strong evidence. Activity for its own sake is not enough. This sounds true as many evaluations of projects and programmes

emphasise the positive nature of the experience and rarely measure the extent to which a student achieved the goal of the programme, e.g. learned to read or write or got a job, etc.

This sounds eminently sensible until the appalling idea dawns that the essence of competition is that there are winners and losers. The powerful, the articulate, the learned win competitions. We must take seriously the recent statement by the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform that "a dynamic liberal economy like ours demands flexibility and inequality in some respects to function" (Crowley, 2004). This inequality provides incentives, he continues. The implication is that those disadvantaged and unable to take advantage of education the first time round must now compete for a second chance and their disadvantage is an incentive to compete. A worthwhile experience is not enough and one suspects that good educational outcomes may also not be enough to satisfy the funding criteria of such a State. Lifelong learning is the mantra of this version of adult education.

As a counter position lifelong learning must be clearly established as a right. We know enough about the way advantage and wealth in our society are distributed and reproduced through the education system to continue to campaign for the right to lifelong learning for all. Lifelong learning needs to be reclaimed from the functional, the instrumental, the economic and the one-dimensional to mean a right to learn all that it is possible to learn.

Adults deserve the very best teaching and the most highly *qualified teachers*. Teaching adults is different to teaching children. Teaching on the basis of ones intuition or experience may produce some wonderful teachers but both intuition and experience may also lead one astray. Community Education Facilitators and Literacy facilitators are engaging in their own training programme. The inability of the State to acknowledge qualifications for working with adults is little short of neglectful. Attention needs to be given to the need for a trained professional group of adult educators bringing with them their experience and intuitions as well as being in touch with the ideas, concepts, traditions and skills of their chosen field.

The most important task for the State is to implement the recommendations outlined in the White Paper especially the proposal to establish Local Adult Learning Boards.

Adult Education and the State

In discussing the relationship between the State and adult education there are two concerns. Firstly, local government is being restructured. Secondly, there is the relationship between the State and the economy. Both impact on adult education in different ways.

The State and Civil Society

The arrival of partnership companies as key players in the education system has heralded a shift in the balance of power at local level. The absence of elected local representatives in Partnership companies allied to the strong representation from community groups has altered the dynamic between the bottom-up philosophy of community development and the top-down model of Government. Strong community involvement in the design and delivery of local projects and services is altering the link between local government and the community, between the government and the governed. In a recent review of a number of INTEGRA projects such a development is highlighted (Fleming & Murphy, 2003, p. 39). In addressing the EU driven demand for integration of services;

The task is to create a structure in which both the top-down of government/state and the bottom-up of local development can coordinate their efforts, resources and tasks. If this implies a complete restructuring of local government and its remit, then the task is at least named as that. The not so hidden agenda of projects...is a radical reform of local government.

Many projects in communities are forging a new and as yet undefined interface between the State and the community, a restructuring of the relationship between the State and civil society. It might be opportune for adult education as a field to explore the possibilities of linking with County Development Boards as structures that would also support and encourage adult education. It is important that adult education does not see itself as tied exclusively to one agency (VEC) but as part of a new restructured local government interested in the delivery of an integrated service.

The State and the Economy

In looking at the relationship between adult education and the State there is a dilemma. On the one hand the State is responsible for most adult education funding. On the other there is a history of adult education residing in civil society, in that part of the community where the family and voluntary organisa-

tions are found. The State has particular difficulty acting in the interests of this community or civil society because, some would say, it has been seduced, maybe corrupted, by the economy to act in its interests. In this way the tendency of the State is to support a vision of lifelong learning and adult education that sustains the economy and values learning that involves job skills and upskilling. In fact the Government sets as a priority the learning that supports economic development. There is rhetoric of social inclusion and equality but that too has an economic intent. There is a contradiction between the inequality the system needs (according to the Minister for Justice) and the objective of social cohesion or social justice.

If we were to operate on the basis that we support the full range of learning that is possible for adults and respond to adults in their complex entirety we would look for learning that is not merely of economic potential.

What is there over and above the economic? What kinds of learnings are possible and usually missing? There are the legitimate concerns that the State itself ought to have, i.e. the common good, justice, care, and the exercise of power in the interests of all its citizens. Secondly, there is civil society or that sector of society that concerns itself with family, community and voluntary organisations and is the locus for the potential expansion of democracy (Cohen & Arato, 1992, p. vii). Adult education can concern itself with the state by promoting second chance, citizen education and equality. Adult education can also concern itself with the economy by teaching job skills, upskilling and indeed functional literacy. However, adult education in civil society concerns itself with learning for family, community and social involvements. Above all it concerns itself with increasing the potential for democratic interactions and making the system world more democratically accountable. Unfortunately, there is conflict between the system world (state and economy) and civil society. Many adult educators operate at the uncomfortable interface between the system world and the community.

It is not easy to ensure that qualifications and standardized frameworks, for example, do not become informed by system imperatives alone but are also informed by educational imperatives. In other words quality assurance is not just an administrative or bureaucratic demand but should also make sense on educational grounds. It is not surprising that it is these very learnings that the State finds uncomfortable, questioning of their position and critical of their

actions. Of course the State will not teach citizens to ask really critical questions about power in society, it will not teach people to protest about injustices or critique or transgress.

What I am proposing is the kind of adult education that speaks to people's highest aspirations; that aims at reaching the full potential of what it is to be an adult and opens the possibility that adults will be able to engage in the most significant kind of learning possible. What I am proposing is against seeing adults merely as workers, against seeing citizens only as consumers and clients; against the idea that hospital waiting lists are the only choice for a highly developed European nation. It questions the relationship between business and politicians and is able to see why it is not the legitimate business of the economic sector to fund political parties. It questions and interrogates the American invasion of Iraq aware of the complex range of political, ideological and economic dimensions of these actions. This learning questions why civil society is the location for so much violence and teaches how to take action against this situation.

Adult educators need the best support, training, education and qualifications so that the passion and commitment to a better community and society can be fuelled with ideas and knowledge and the skills required to bring about this goal for everyone. Adult education at its best helps to create spaces in which adults can discuss the kind of society in which we find ourselves; the kind of society we want to create and learn the skills required to bring about a society that is more just, more fair and where the state and the economy are subject to democratic accountability.

We are capable of dreaming of a different world in which there might be justice, care, freedom and an end to the violations. This learning is social, political, critical and seeks to change systems and institutions that are now operated in the interests of the few so that they operate in the interests of all (Fleming, 1998).

It would help to ensure that we do not join forces with what Camus called the pestilences:

Really it's too damn silly living in and for the plague. Of course a man should fight for the victims, but, if he ceases caring for anything outside that, what's the use of his fighting? (Camus, 1960, p. 209)

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Adult Education in Ireland: The implications of developments at European Union level

HELEN KEOGH

Any consideration of recent and proposed developments in education and training at European Union (EU) level points, in a word, to *Lisbon*. *Lisbon*, as in the *Lisbon Agenda*, is the destination, the compass and the journey driving developments in education and training systems in the EU member states. This paper sketches some of these developments and sets out their implications for adult education stakeholders in Ireland from now until 2010. *Adult education* is understood as publicly-funded provision for adult learning in statutory and other agencies, outside of the statutory training sector. Adult education *stakeholders* are understood to include policy makers, practitioners, participants, theorists and commentators.

Developments in Adult Education in Ireland pre – 2000 – The Role of the European Social Fund (ESF)

Up to the year 2000, statutory sector adult education stakeholders' main experience of the EU was as a funder, through the European Social Fund (ESF), of programmes such as Youthreach, Senior Traveller Training Centres, VTOS and PLCs. The benefits arising included responses to local individual and collective learning needs; a blurring of boundaries between education and training; certification opportunities; progression opportunities; staffing of services and in-career development opportunities.

But the way the ESF operated (O'Connor 1998) also brought opportunity costs for adult education. Most notable is the resultant programme rather than service infrastructure, giving rise to a compartmentalised 'egg carton' model of provision (Keogh, 2003). Limited integration across the various stand-alone programmes results in limited pooling of resources, limited staff mobility,

reduced flexibility, and, most critically, possible restrictions on learner progression within and beyond existing provision. In addition, the relative lack of emphasis on support services within ESF meant that adult educational guidance was not addressed until the publication of the White Paper on adult education in 2000.

Developments at EU Level post – 2000 – Implications for Adult Education in Ireland

By 2000, adult education provision in Ireland funded by the Department of Education and Science could be said to have been the result of what, in an associated context, O'Connor (1998) termed 'the interaction of basically unrelated events, rather than . . . some overall plan'. The *Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education* (Government of Ireland 2000) provided a framework for expanding provision for 'those most at risk' and since 2000 ESF support has been key to the implementation of the strategy set out in the White Paper.

Early in 2000, at EU level, the heads of state and government, meeting in Lisbon within the European Council, had set the goal that by 2010 the EU should become '*the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world . . . with more and better jobs and . . . greater social cohesion*'. The Lisbon goals covered research, education, training, Internet access, ebusiness and reform of Europe's social protection systems. Access to lifelong learning was recognised as having a vital role in the achievement of the Lisbon goals.

Since 2000, these top-level policy guidelines have given rise to a structured set of initiatives designed to improve quality and strengthen co-operation in education and training across the EU. Two specific policy initiatives merit mention, the concrete objectives initiative and the lifelong learning initiative.

Concrete Objectives of Education and Training Systems

The Lisbon European Council called for reflection on the concrete objectives of education systems, focusing on common concerns while respecting national diversity. It also defined a new approach to political co-ordination: the 'open method of co-ordination' (OMC) which would draw on tools such as indicators and benchmarks as well as on comparison of best practice, monitoring, evaluation and peer review.

In March 2001 the Stockholm European Council approved the *Report on the concrete future objectives of education systems* which set out a coherent overall approach to national education policies in the context of the EU, on the basis of three major objectives:

- improving the quality of education and training systems
- making lifelong learning more accessible to everyone
- making education and training systems more outward-looking as regards the rest of the world.

The report was the first official document sketching a comprehensive and coherent European approach to national education and training policies in the EU and was a major breakthrough for educational co-operation in Europe.

The subsequent work programme *Education and Training 2010* adopted in February 2002 by the Barcelona European Council defined a set of thirteen objectives and over 40 more detailed sub-objectives within a framework of lifelong learning. The work programme proposed the ‘open method of co-ordination’ defined in Lisbon to foster and measure progress. Education and training were recognised as a *key priority domain* in the overall Lisbon Agenda.

The interim report on progress towards the Lisbon goals, *Education and Training 2010: the success of the Lisbon strategy hinges on urgent reforms* was submitted to the European Council in Brussels in March 2004. The report adopts an hortatory stance in urging that three priority areas be worked on, ‘*simultaneously and without delay*’. More effective and efficient investment in human resource development is urgently required; lifelong learning must become a concrete reality; a Europe of education and training must be established, including a European qualifications framework.

Adult education stakeholders in Ireland, especially providers at all levels, will welcome the call for enhanced investment in adult learning. However, investment will need to be monitored to ensure a balance between investment in human resource development and human potential development. The fact that from now until 2010 there will be a report every two years on progress in the implementation of Education and Training 2010 will assist that monitoring process.

Lifelong Learning; a New Strategic Vision for Education and Training

The second specific policy initiative adopted by the European Commission to support the Lisbon Agenda was that of lifelong learning. In the European Commission's *Memorandum on Lifelong Learning* (MLLL, November 2000) lifelong learning was presented as a vision, a conceptual framework for thinking about education and training and a guiding principle for provision and participation across all learning contexts.

On the basis of a Europe-wide consultation on the MLLL, the Commission adopted the *Communication, making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality*, in November 2001. The *Communication* defined lifelong learning as 'any learning activity undertaken throughout life with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective'. The comprehensiveness of this definition was welcomed by adult educators in Ireland and throughout Europe. The *Communication's* emphasis on adult learning for active citizenship was considered significant in the context of an increasing Europe-wide focus, in practice, on adult learning for economic goals. This is of particular relevance for adult educators in Ireland given the growing ethnic and cultural diversity of society.

But the concept of lifelong learning also presents challenges to adult education stakeholders in Ireland. It places a focus on the individual and on learning rather than on systems, institutions, teaching and assessment. It acknowledges and values learning from a multiplicity of learning sites – formal, non-formal and informal – and it challenges the traditional boundaries between education and training. It raises important questions about 'ownership' of knowledge, financing of learning, the quantity and quality of learning, learner supports and the changing roles of policy-makers, providers and accrediting bodies.

The key message in the *Communication* about the importance of a *partnership approach* as the first building block in a coherent and comprehensive lifelong learning strategy has implications for policy-makers and practitioners alike in Ireland. Partnerships will support co-operation by relevant actors for coherence of responses to learning needs; co-financing of learning opportunities; diverse outcomes and recognition of learning from multiple settings.

In June 2002, on foot of an Education Council resolution confirming that lifelong learning should become the guiding principle for the development of

education and training policy in Europe, the Commission decided to locate future work on lifelong learning policy in the framework of achieving the concrete objectives of education and training systems.

However, a recent internal Commission review points to limited integration of a broad concept of lifelong learning into the objectives process. Adult education and learning are 'rarely present in an explicit way' in policy documents and reports of the objectives working groups. Only four of the eight working groups have addressed adult education and learning explicitly and many members of the groups have professional backgrounds in schooling or higher education rather than adult education. This is a worrying trend for adult educators. It appears to indicate that education and training are seen in terms of school and higher education provision within the objectives process and may point to misconceptions among the groups about the nature of, and need for, planned publicly-funded adult education for social inclusion through learning. It also points to a limited interpretation of the concept lifelong learning set out in the Commission's own *Memorandum* (2000) and *Communication* (2001) which saw learning as a cradle to grave activity (Grundtvig Working Group, 2004). Furthermore, it underscores the need for adult education stakeholders, especially national policy-makers, to ensure that working group representatives from the member states are fully briefed on adult education issues.

In this context, it may be useful to recall that, in addition to the work of the EU Directorate-General for Education and Culture, education and training – and lifelong learning as a structuring policy strategy – are a key dimension of a broad variety of EU and national policies, including employment; information society; youth; active citizenship; R&D; environment, consumer affairs and social policy. This broader policy and practice landscape supports adult educators in Ireland in pressing the case for lifewide and life-related as well as lifelong learning.

In 2003 the Education Council, in the context of the objectives of education and training systems, adopted five benchmarks or 'reference levels of European average performance' for the improvement of education and training systems in the member states. The following are of particular interest to adult education stakeholders:

- by 2010 at least 80% of 22 year olds will have completed upper secondary education in the EU

- by 2010 EU average participation in lifelong learning by the 25-64 age group will be at least 12.5%.

With regard to benchmarks and indicators, it is important for adult education stakeholders to recognise that they are 'here to stay' and that they will shape the quantity and quality of adult education from now until 2010. In view of the fact that what is measured is what is valued - and funded! - a critical issue for adult educators in Ireland and elsewhere is to ensure that measurement of education and training participation and outcomes at member state and EU level is based on a broad concept of lifelong and lifewide learning.

New Generation of Community Action Programmes

Throughout 2003 adult education policy-makers and practitioners in Ireland had an opportunity of participating in the consultation on the shape of the next generation of Community Action programmes. In March 2004 the Commission unveiled its proposal for an *Integrated Programme in Lifelong Learning 2007-2013*. An integrated programme with four sectoral programmes, including the new stand-alone Grundtvig programme for adult education, is proposed. In keeping with an overall thrust towards cohesion and integration and in a bid to enhance its effectiveness and impact, the overall integrated programme will reflect the goals of the Lisbon Agenda and will provide test-beds for the recommendations of the objectives' working groups. Under the Grundtvig programme it is proposed that at least 50,000 adults, including adult education providers, staff and learners, will benefit from education or training abroad each year by 2013.

The establishment of a distinct sectoral programme for general and civic adult had strong support from key personnel within the Commission and the resulting Grundtvig programme has been widely welcomed. The challenge for adult education stakeholders in Ireland will be to increase the level of participation by Irish partners in the proposed programme and to harness the learning arising from transnational co-operation and mobility to enhance adult education policy-making and provision in Ireland.

March 2004 also saw the launch of *Citizenship in Action*, which will also run from 2007. The proposed programme will enable civil society, faith-based, youth and cultural organisations, trade unions and family associations to draw down funding for activities that will contribute to the development of active

and participatory citizenship. This programme will have particular significance for community-based learning groups and organisations in Ireland and will support learning for interculturalism and civic participation as proposed in the White Paper on adult education.

Irish EU Presidency

The first half of 2004 was of special interest to adult education stakeholders in Ireland. The achievement of the Lisbon goals was a central theme of Ireland's EU Presidency. In May 2004 the first Education Council meeting in an enlarged Europe adopted a Resolution recognising the importance of guidance activities in the context of lifelong learning. This development should strengthen the calls in Ireland for an expansion of the adult educational guidance provision and for a transition from a project to a service infrastructure to enable integration of guidance into local adult education services. Political agreement was also achieved at the Council on the Europass proposal to improve the transparency and mutual recognition of qualifications. Europass will support the mobility of adult learners, within, to and from Ireland and will support the work of accreditation and qualifications bodies in Ireland. In addition, common European principles for the identification and validation of informal and non-formal learning were adopted by the Council. These principles and emerging follow-on strategies will play a major role in valuing adult learning achieved in diverse learning locations in Ireland.

Conclusion

While at first glance much of what has happened in terms of policy initiatives on education and training at EU and member state levels since 2000 might appear disjointed and unfocused, there are nevertheless clear underlying principles and strategies. A key advance has been the development of the first coherent overarching strategy for education systems within the collective goals set by the Lisbon Agenda and consolidated by the integrated objectives and lifelong learning process.

At EU policy level, the *Education and Training 2010* work programme is driven by the representatives of the member states on the objectives' working groups, at the meetings of Directors-General of Vocational Training and Directors-General of Adult Education and at the meetings of the Education Committee and the Education Council. At national policy level, a key challenge for policy-makers is to produce comprehensive strategies leading to operational policies,

programmes and initiatives to go beyond rhetoric and put the objectives process into practice. In adult education, securing funding to support these strategies and putting robust monitoring and evaluation in place to measure effectiveness will be key tasks to 2010.

At practice level, adult education stakeholders in Ireland have the twin challenges of influencing policy development and implementing the resultant policies. Despite the frequent perception of a 'democratic deficit' within the EU, adult educators on the ground can impact on policy at EU level through influencing national policy-makers who participate in the numerous EU fora on which the member states are represented. In addition, the national agencies managing the Community Action programmes in Ireland constantly seek feedback from adult education practitioners and policy-makers. A less direct channel of influence lies through communication with Irish MEPs, especially those who sit on the Education Committee.

At the level of practice, adult education stakeholders are, whether they are aware of it or not, already implementing key aspects of the Lisbon Agenda when they: provide lifelong, lifewide and life-related learning opportunities; strive to increase the quantity and quality of adult learning through learner-centred and flexible learning opportunities; provide certification opportunities; seek to integrate the adult guidance projects into the adult education service; seek to quality assure provision; participate in the development of learning regions through the R3L initiative or the strategies of the county or city development boards; engage in a Grundtvig action.

As *Education and Training 2010* is implemented over the next six years to 2010 adult educators can expect to see: an on-going need to press the case for a publicly-funded professional adult education service in the interests of equal opportunities, social inclusion and social cohesion; a more integrated adult education service supported by global funding at local level; a paradigm shift from supply-led to demand-driven learning opportunities and from provider-centred to learner-centred provision, including a bigger role for ICTs; greater emphasis on meeting the learning needs of multicultural populations in an intercultural Ireland; stronger partnerships to support adult learning, including closer co-operation between government departments and increased stakeholder co-financing of learning; seamless opportunities for learning and recognition of that learning within a national framework of qualifications;

emphasis on the quantity of learning being matched by an equal emphasis on the quality of learning within FETAC and other quality frameworks; developing information systems incorporating indicators and benchmarks for accountability, efficiency and effectiveness; pre-service and continuing professional development for adult education personnel to support the emerging transition from an 'heroic' to a professional model of adult education. Clearly, Lisbon set in motion a challenging agenda . . .

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Swimming with the (main) stream? The relationship of adult education and the lifelong learning agenda in post-devolution UK

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The (main)Stream of Lifelong Learning

For a decade or so the policy debate on post-school education and training across OECD countries has been shaped to a considerable extent by the associated, although distinct, concepts of lifelong learning and the learning society. Developments in the UK have both reflected this trend and contributed to pushing forward these notions. For that part of the post-compulsory sector encompassed within the loosely defined arena of adult education this focus on lifelong learning might have been expected to have led to the - long heralded - shift in adult education from the margins to a more central role in relation to policy and educational provision. At a minimum, the idea of learning over the lifecycle surely lies at the heart of the concept of lifelong learning?

The plethora of policy documents at national and international levels published on the subject around ten years ago did indeed make explicit, albeit in a variety of different ways, the importance of continuing education and training for the adult population (EC: 1995; OECD: 1996; UNESCO: 1996). The arguments included: the changing nature of the globalised economy, the rapid pace of technological and associated social changes, the pressure of social movements for greater equity, demographic trends and patterns of migration.

A decade on, might it not therefore be reasonable to expect that the adult education community would find itself, perhaps unusually, swimming with, as opposed to against, the (main)stream?¹ This paper reviews developments in

¹ As an aside it has to be noted that there is no single adult education community or tradition. For the purposes of this discussion, adult education is equated with that element which emphasises the interconnectedness of personal and social development.

the UK over the last decade through an analysis of five major issues. The list is not intended to be exhaustive but addresses several significant areas as evident in contemporary policy papers, the research literature and legislative changes. The situation of individual countries will of course vary. However, some of the experiences of the constituent parts of the UK are likely to find echoes in Ireland as they reflect the impact of common global economic and social forces, mediated by national and regional circumstances.

The thrust of the argument presented here is that in relation to the situation in the UK there are major tensions, if not contradictions, in terms of the contribution of recent lifelong learning policy priorities to the achievement of adult education objectives. It should come as no surprise that we encounter such tensions and contradictions. In a research programme commissioned by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) over this period on the nature of the learning society, Coffield and his colleagues identify no fewer than ten different, conceptual models of the learning society (Coffield: 2000).

These different conceptions of the learning society reflect the different perspectives of the various social and political players and they carry different implications for lifelong learning and its relationship to the adult education community- specifically, using Coffield's typology, the adult education perspective would be associated mainly with a combination of 'personal development', 'local learning societies', 'education reform' and 'structural change' conceptions of the learning society.

Areas of Congruence and Tension

The debate in the UK can be characterised as being between a skills' model and a social model of lifelong learning- with the balance of power firmly in the hands of the former. There were high expectations that the election of a new Labour Government in 1997 might lead to a shift in this balance. While the rhetoric reflected values held in high regard by adult educators concerning issues of equity, access, community involvement and the like, the record of New Labour in terms of policy formulation and implementation is, at best, mixed (Taylor: 2005, forthcoming). Many of those in the sector feel a degree of frustration and disappointment seven years on.

It is suggested here that one reason for the feeling of expectations being raised only to be let down is that much of the language and terminology used was not

only familiar to, but in some cases drawn from, the adult education tradition. Five distinct, but interrelated, themes are highlighted here to illustrate this point.

First is the *wider access* agenda, a major priority for Governments since the 1980s and particularly for New Labour Governments since 1997; second, the recognition and *assessment* of prior and experiential learning based on a variety of environments, including the workplace; third, an emphasis on *quality and learner centredness*; fourth, the development of *pathways* to assist in mobility through the post-compulsory education and training system; and fifth, an emphasis on *partnership* at strategic and operational levels.

To varying extents the above represent potential areas of congruence between the adult education perspective and that of the lifelong learning agenda. Before moving on to these themes however it is necessary to refer to the broader policy context, in particular the major constitutional changes which have taken place in recent years in the UK.

Constitutional Change

Devolution resulted in the establishment of the Parliament in Scotland and the Assemblies in Wales and, albeit short-lived, in Northern Ireland. Fullick's (2004) review of lifelong learning policy and structural changes in England since 1997, for example, points to a number of the complex array of agencies which have been established by Government with an involvement in the education and training of adults.

- Establishment in 2000 of the *Learning and Skills Council* (LSC) with responsibility for strategic planning, funding and quality assurance for all publicly funded post-16 education and training (excluding higher education) and operating through 47 local LSCs – widely regarded as the most significant structural change for at least a decade in the sector.
- *Regional Development Agencies* (RDAs) established in 1998 as part of increasing devolution to English Regions with, amongst others things, a remit for skills enhancement associated with regional economic development and regeneration.
- *Learning Partnerships*, numbering 104 around England, established in 1999 to act as non-statutory voluntary groupings of local learning providers and others.
- *Local Strategic Partnerships*, with a broader remit than education and training but intended to form a single body that brings together at a local level

the different parts of the public sector with employers, the voluntary sector, local authorities and the like.

- *Local Authorities* – until the 1990s one of the major providers of adult learning who although considerably weakened in powers in recent years remain important players through their involvement in libraries, sport, cultural, youth, community, social and other services.

There have been increasingly differential strategies for the development of lifelong learning in the different parts of the UK (Phillips: 2002; Gorard: 2000; Field: 2003)). For example, when the National Advisory Group on adult and lifelong learning produced a report covering England, Wales and Northern Ireland, espousing what was widely regarded in the field as being a broad and inclusive vision for adult learning, envious glances were cast southwards from Scotland. (DfEE: 1998) In contrast, the reverse was the case when, as one of its very early decisions, the newly established Scottish Parliament set up an Independent Committee of Inquiry on Student Finance (the ‘Cubie’ Committee). As a result of this Inquiry, Parliament acted on the recommendation to set up an Endowment scheme in place of the up-front payment of fees by full-time higher education students as had been introduced in other parts of the UK (Independent Committee of Inquiry: 1999).

In the case of Scotland also, there has been some evidence that politicians and policy makers may indeed be listening to the views of stakeholders. Thus, when the cross-party Committee on Enterprise and Lifelong Learning issued a draft consultation paper for a proposed lifelong learning strategy it was confined to adults ‘of working age’. The final version of the report observes:

Several witnesses to the inquiry expressed concern with this definition considering that it placed too much emphasis on the economic aspect of lifelong learning and seeking a broader definition encompassing the cultural, civic, individual and social inclusion aspects of lifelong learning. We agreed with these arguments, and decided not to adopt a working age limit for the inquiry.... We therefore decided to adopt the following definition of lifelong learning: ‘The continuous development of knowledge and skills aimed at enhancing the individual’s quality of life and society’s well being’.

(Scottish Parliament: 2002, paragraphs 3,4)

Despite the emergence-or, in some areas, the strengthening- of differences between different parts of the UK the following five issues have some relevance to *all* OECD states, including Ireland. They have in common a combination of dominant policy forces, emphasising the economic imperative, with an alternative adult education emphasis on the social and personal aspects of lifelong learning- both of which, confusingly, share much of the same vocabulary (Edwards: 1997).

Five Issues

(i) Widening Access

At face value, the widening access agenda would appear to give a central role to the culture, priorities and expertise associated with adult education. This has in fact been one of the dominant policy themes in post-compulsory education and training for the UK over the last decade. (From media coverage it sometimes seems that this is the *only* educational policy issue for the over-18 section of the population.)

Like Ireland, the UK higher education system has experienced dramatic growth to a point where around well over one third of school leavers enter higher education across the system as a whole, with many, in particular adults, entering further education colleges (Slowey: 2000; Parry and Thompson: 2001). A target of 50% participation for those aged 18 to 30 years has been set as a key UK Government objective to achieve by 2010. According to the statistics, this target has already been reached in Scotland where around half of new entrants to higher education enrol in colleges of further education (Gallacher: 2002; Osborne et al: 2002).

Despite this expansion, as Field points out, there has been a broadly even rise in participation levels across the social classes in England over the period 1991-2000 (Field: 2003 (b)). From an equity perspective this means that expansion has made little or no progress towards abolishing social class differentials and associated gross social inequalities. (Field also points out that most of the steep changes in expansion took place under the long running Conservative Governments of 1979 to 1997.)

The numbers and proportion of full-time mature students, those over 21 on entry to higher education, have also increased over this period. However, the strategy of Government, as translated through the Higher Education Funding

Councils, tends to equate access with young people in general, and school leavers in particular, an equation which is reflected in a variety of targeted funding initiatives. Moreover, expansion is justified very largely in terms of human capital arguments for improving the skills base of the labour force.

The adult education community, represented through the work of NIACE (National Institute for Adult Continuing Education) and UACE (the Universities Association for Continuing Education) has extensively lobbied Government about the potential, possibly unintended consequences, focusing on widening participation for school leavers and young adults and defined over narrowly in 'skills agenda' terms. There is an abundance of anecdotal evidence which points to the threat which has been posed to long standing successful access activities aimed at adult learners because the Government's access incentives are orientated in a different direction.

(ii) Recognition of Learning Wherever it Takes Place

Adult educators have long been to the fore in presenting the case for the development of learning opportunities in non-formal and informal environments, including the workplace, and associated with lobbying for the recognition of learning wherever, and whenever, it takes place.

Again, this is a topic which in the UK was taken up, albeit in different ways, by both radical adult educators and the Conservative Government as part of its skills enhancement strategy, and which has found resonances with the following Labour administrations (Taylor: 2002). One particular manifestation has been the development of a focus on work based-learning as the WEA (Workers' Educational Association) and other adult education bodies have been actively in collaboration with the trade unions in targeting low skilled and low waged sectors of the labour force. The Government's Union Learning Fund, the development of basic skills provision and the emphasis on Modern Apprenticeships Scheme are all prominent examples of Labour's commitment in the area (Fullick: 2004).

On the other hand however, despite protests to the contrary, there is at least an argument to be made about the danger of narrowing the focus to employability skills and the dominance of the human capital approach. As Jackson and Jordan observe, what was initially envisaged as a short-term response to youth unemployment and then adult unemployment associated with the business

cycle, has gradually become accepted as a central and defining component of macro economy policy (Jackson and Jackson: 2000, p.196). This is made quite explicit in one of the five goals of the Lifelong Learning Strategy developed by the Scottish Executive in the official response to the Parliamentary Committee paper. As highlighted earlier, the latter sought to develop quite an inclusive vision, whereas – despite some rhetoric to the contrary – the former reverts to the dominant skills model, with a vision of a Scotland “...where people’s knowledge and skills are recognised, used and developed to their best effect in the workplace” (Scottish Executive: 2003, p.48).

As a further indication of the domination of the skills agenda, there is some evidence to suggest that some people are finding themselves in situations where they have to engage in learning in order simply to maintain their economic and/or social positions. In the national Adult Learners’ Survey conducted on an annual basis by NIACE for example, 5% of respondents in Scotland and 6% across the UK who had recently, or were currently, engaged in learning in an active way said that it was not by personal choice- in most cases this was either to retain social welfare benefits or because of employer requirements (Slowey (a): 2003). Is this what is meant by a learning society?

Implicit within the adult education tradition as defined here has been the notion that more opportunities for learning for adults are, by definition, a ‘good thing’. In the context of growing insecurity in the labour market for many people- probably the majority- does the learning society mean that more and more people are directly or indirectly compelled onto what might be termed a learning treadmill? The salient point here is that whereas the dominant model of lifelong learning emphasises strongly the human capital, labour market orientation, the adult education model has seen the primary purpose of adult learning as being a combination of personal development and fulfilment, and emancipatory social purpose provision, linked in turn to a strong notion of personal choice and progressive change.

(iii) Accreditation, Quality and Learner Centred Approaches

The dominant lifelong learning agenda across the constituent parts of the UK also places considerable emphasis on issues of quality. Again, this can be illustrated through another of the Scottish Executive’s five goals which relates to a Scotland “...where people demand, and providers deliver high quality learning experience” (Scottish Executive: 2003, p.43). To this end the strategy states

that quality assurance frameworks should focus on outcomes and the key processes that impact on the learner's experience, including the factors that promote or hinder access; be as consistent as possible across all sectors and providers in principle and approach; and be regularly reviewed. Nothing to quarrel with here, these are simply statements which would be welcomed by any adult educator as reflecting good practice.

However, what this section of the report also reveals is the nature of the quality assurance 'industry' which has grown up around this sector, involving, to name just a few, the Scottish Qualifications Authority, the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Councils, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education, Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise, the Scottish Quality Management System, the Quality Assurance Agency and Community Education Validation and Endorsement. In fairness the Report does point out that the various quality assurance arrangements have been criticised by those in the field for over-auditing in some cases while not being sufficiently rigorous in others.

Whilst all involved wish to be associated with high quality provision, there are major concerns for the adult education community arising from the following strong and general tendency that:

- quality becomes equated with outcomes (bureaucratically, rather than educationally defined);
- outcomes become equated with measurement;
- measurement becomes equated with accreditation.

The challenges are to find ways in which, given the pervasive nature of the audit climate which applies to all parts of the sector, not only lifelong learning, accountability for investment in learning which does not automatically lead to qualifications can be demonstrated and the primacy of *educational* criteria reasserted. This is a challenge to which neither the adult education community nor the funding agencies have yet adequately responded.

(iv) Pathways

One of the major claims for the lifelong learning agenda is that it represents a shift away from the traditional front loaded, linear approaches to education and training (for example, OECD: 1996). The achievement of this new model is regarded as being strongly associated with the development of new and more

flexible pathways into, and around, education and training. One image is of a 'climbing frame' model where people might be facilitated in moving in, out, up, down and across the learning landscape. However, in practice to date the frameworks which have been developed are essentially linear in conception. This trend- and the minor industry which it has spawned of qualification and calibration framework experts- is closely aligned with issues of accreditation discussed above.

It is in this context that the notion of 'entitlement' is central. In a situation, as always, of scarce public resources to what extent should those who have had an opportunity to learn at a particular level have the opportunity to learn at that level again? The answer from an adult education perspective is obvious- and it is also the logic underlying lifelong learning: people should be encouraged to learn on a continuous basis at whatever level is appropriate to their learning needs at a particular time.

It is quite inappropriate, and unrealistic, to conceive of learning as an upward conveyor belt. McGivney's studies of how adults actually learn confirms that, in relation to progression, there is no clear typology of adult learning pathways:

...any kind of learning can lead to linear progression outcomes as to other outcomes that are valued by the learners. However, all the evidence indicates that sideways or horizontal pathways are still very popular amongst adult learners.

(McGivney: 2003, p.48)

Strategies to encourage progression need to take account of the enormous diversity of adult learning interests and goals, and the complex ways in which individuals move in and out of the areas in which they are interested in learning about over their lifecourse. This untidy reality of adult learning poses some challenges to policy makers. In Scotland, for example, the Parliamentary Inquiry on Lifelong Learning attempted to address this matter, recommending that the current 'entitlement' to learning should be made more flexible, so that more than one qualification at the same level can be undertaken. While this was welcomed by the adult education community as a move in the right direction, the discussion remains within the dominating discourse of qualifications- important of course for many, if not most, adult learners- but just one part of the whole landscape of adult learning.

The determining role assigned to accreditation and qualifications as the key mechanisms for ensuring quality and delineation of learning routes has been evident now for over two decades. Part of the challenge here remains the continuing difficulty which policy makers seem to encounter in addressing all forms of learning outside formal education systems. While it is difficult to find figures on expenditure on different parts of the system, despite the rhetoric of lifelong learning, the allocation of public support for education and training almost certainly remains as devoted as ever to full-time students, and young adults effectively continuing their initial education. There are understandable issues here:

We recognise that state funded entitlements to part-time adult learning could support dead weight (that is pay for things that might otherwise have been paid by individuals and/or employers).

(Scottish Parliament: 2002, paragraph 106)

This is no excuse however for the lack of action by successive Governments for what amounts to unfair treatment by the State for the vast majority of adults who wish to learn on a part-time basis.

(v) Partnership

In recent years many of the initiatives supported at national and regional levels place an emphasis on partnership working between the public, private and voluntary sectors. Whilst this has been a persistent rhetoric, the practice has been rather different. The system is still based largely upon competitive structures and processes – providers still have to compete for initiative funding, and, of course, student enrolments. Nevertheless, the ethos of partnership has a long tradition in adult education and the sector has certain strengths, acting as an interface between the formal education sector- colleges and universities- employers, state training agencies, community organisations and individual learners.

While interagency working is always complex, particular difficulties seem to appear when the notion of partnership is translated from an organic method of operation into a bureaucratic requirement. This problem does not just apply to the educational arena. A major study on urban regeneration partnerships (URPs) in England, where partnership working is frequently a requirement for state support, concludes that:

...while many participants in URPs are supportive of co-ordination in princi-

ple, they were critical of the ways in which partnerships operated...It was far from clear to non-community agents that communities actually become heavily involved in regeneration, instead they deal with a series of local activists, whose representativeness is often dubious. Those activists in turn, find it difficult to build up trusting relationships with other agencies that lead to widespread beneficial partnership co-operation. The principle of community participation is often at variance with its practice.

(ESRC: 2004, p.7)

One of the challenges in relation to the increasing stipulation for partnership working for the adult education sector lies in the differential nature of the power bases between the voluntary and community sectors and the more formal parts of the system including colleges, universities and public and private sector training agencies. In England, for example, the enormous budgeting power of the LSCs, mentioned above, coupled with the complexity of its bureaucratic structures make it often an intimidating, if not impenetrable, organisation for the community and voluntary sectors. The role of 'bridging' units with appropriate expertise can be important in helping forge more equal and productive links between the formal and non-formal sectors. In the case of higher education, to take one small but significant example, Departments/Centres of Adult Education or their equivalents have frequently fulfilled this function, acting at the interface between communities and their universities, an activity which paradoxically, reflecting the underlying tensions and contradictions highlighted in this discussion, is currently under some threat (Watson, 2001; Slowey (b), 2003).

Broadening the Vision

The five issues explored above are simply a selection from a range of topics which could be highlighted as offering potential areas of congruence- swimming *with* the (main)stream- between adult education (as defined for purposes of this discussion) and the lifelong learning agenda. They also however point to tensions, if not contradictions, in practice for the interests of adult learners where the adult education community finds itself swimming *against* the (main)stream.

In the UK, as in most states, these tensions are hardly surprising. At a macro level they are a reflection of different value systems manifested through different interpretations of what is meant by the learning society: on the one hand a

dominant policy emphasis on the skills agenda driven by perceived interests of capital and the economy, and on the other the social agenda, as interpreted by adult educators amongst others. Nor can the resource context be ignored.

The policy dilemma is very clear – we want more, and more diverse, people to have access, we want to maintain the quality of what is provided, and we want to do this with shrinking public funds.

(Coffield and Williamson: 1997, p.111)

There is little that is new in these challenges for the adult educators of Britain and Ireland steeped in a long tradition of operating on the margins and, to an extent, operating as a counter-cultural force. A great strength of this tradition lies in the ability to adapt and find new ways of maintaining and developing valuable educational work often despite dominant perspectives and legislative changes. This is undoubtedly energy absorbing as, for example, tried and tested programmes are rebranded to meet the latest funding criteria. Nevertheless, the need for an expert lobby which gives expression to the importance of a wide range of adult learning opportunities *in addition* to those orientated towards qualifications and vocational skills remains as important as ever.

While it is certainly possible to point to areas of progress over the last decade, an analysis of trends in adult participation in learning over the period 1996-2004 across the UK (as measured by the regular surveys conducted by NIACE) regrettably appears to confirm the views held by many practitioners that the emphasis on lifelong learning policy, legislation and new structures is somehow missing the point, if not actually, inadvertently, helping to create new gaps. Aldridge and Tuckett reveal a decline in the proportion of respondents who reported that they were “currently engaged in learning” over this period from 23% to 19%². Even more than this, their analysis suggests that the “learning divide” has actually increased, with “... participation rates falling amongst all but the highest socio-economic groups, and participation falling amongst the poorest (DEs) declining from 26% to 23% (Aldridge and Tuckett, 2004: p.22). Perhaps most worryingly, they suggest that the focus on achievement targets may be part of the reason for this trend, leading to a narrowing of the curriculum on offer to adults “as expansion of provision for young people is bought at

²Note: The definition of learning used in the NIACE survey is very broad, encompassing any form of structured learning, including independent study.

the expense of their elders” (p.23) To the extent that there is validity in this analysis it surely reflects highly undesirable and, no doubt, unintended consequences of current dominant interpretations of lifelong learning.

The thrust of the discussion in this paper, graphically illustrated by these recent survey findings, has pointed to the need for (main)stream lifelong learning policy makers across the UK and internationally to draw upon broader and more diverse perspectives – including, importantly, those associated with the adult education tradition.

This is a lesson which transcends national boundaries.

An interim review was undertaken in 2003 by the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE) of progress towards agreed UNESCO goals in relation to adult learning (ICAE, 2003). This review was able to report some progress in relation to increasing recognition in official discourses of the right of men and women to learn as “an essential tool to improve their conditions of life, if not simply to survive” (p.123). On the other hand, their conclusions in relation to the implementation of this right was that adult learning “... remains, in most countries, associated with literacy and adult basic education, or with work-related learning” (p.124). Vitally important as these areas are, alone they are unlikely to deliver the broader conceptions of the learning society which remains the aim of many adult educators.

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Planning for the future of the Adult Education Service: A challenge for VECs

LUCAS Ó MUIRCHEARTAIGH

Introduction

The adult education service in Ireland has gone through five years of continuous development and expansion since the publication of the *White Paper on Adult Education: Learning for Life* in July 2000. Among the more important developments have been:

- The issuing of Circular Letter 46/00 which enabled the appointment of Directors of Adult Education in Second Level Schools.
- The significant increase in the ALCE budgets.
- The appointment of Community Education Facilitators in 2002/03.
- The introduction of the Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) in 2002.
- The growth in the number of Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Migrant Workers in Ireland since 2000.

There are signs that the salad days for adult education are over. Two recent straws in the wind involve a reduction in childcare provision within VECs and the capping of PLC numbers since September 2003. Adult education like other state services has started experiencing funding difficulties.

Now is an opportune time to reflect on the future development of the adult education service within the VEC system. In that context it is encouraging to note that a number of VECs have recently produced adult education strategies following extensive internal consultation. Some of the recently produced strategies include those of Co Clare VEC; City of Limerick VEC and North Tipperary VEC (as part of its overall education policy FÍS 2020).

Another encouraging development for the future of adult education in the VEC sector was the establishment of an Adult Education Strategic Planning Consortium by four VECs in 2002 – The Kerry Education Service; Co Dublin VEC; City of Limerick VEC and North Tipperary VEC. These VECs held four workshops over an eighteen month period in 2002 and 2003 to reflect on strategic planning for adult education in their own VECs. The reflective (Freirian) process involving staff in various roles in the VEC adult education service was productive and resulted in the sharing of practice and the gaining of valuable insights into the service.

As I pointed out at the start of this paper there has been a significant development of the adult education service in recent years. However, if the service is to become part of the mainstream of Irish education, the issue of structures at all levels within the system has to be addressed. Quite frankly the present system is very unsatisfactory and cannot and will not develop unless it is addressed. The Department of Education and Science took part in a Grundtvig project (NETA) with Spain and Viborg county in Denmark to examine what we are doing in adult education. The Department of Education focussed in the project on *the crucial importance of co-ordination, coherence and cohesion in the provision of learning opportunities for adults* (NETA, 2003). The NETA project in Ireland identified the development of national and local structures, greater national and local co-ordination, clear progression routes and support services as issues which needed attention in providing an overall service to adults.

So structures need to be developed at all levels within the system. In this paper, I will concentrate on what happens at VEC level. However, as all of the levels are inter-related and are co-dependent, I will also consider organisational structures at all levels within adult education.

To plan for the future structures of the adult education service it is necessary to review the present structures. This will give the reader an indication of the task facing those charged with the responsibility of putting appropriate structures in place for the sector. The first section of the paper will review the present structures while the second section will look at future structures.

To help the reader gain an understanding of the task involved it is necessary to review the present structures and look at future structures at the following levels:

1. National
2. Sub-national
3. Institutional
4. Community

Section One - Review of Present Structures

1. National Level

In reviewing the structures at national level I am going to consider the:

- (a) *Statutory Arrangements within the Education Sector.*
- (b) *Statutory Arrangements for Non-Education Sector Providers.*
- (c) *Voluntary Organisations in the Adult Education Sector.*

1(a) National Level - Statutory Arrangements within the Education Sector

The Further Education Section of the Department of Education and Science has overall responsibility for adult education policy and policy implementation. The section is headed by a Minister of State, approved in 1997 and a Principal Officer appointed in 1998.

The Principal Officer reports to an Assistant Secretary General and therefore has direct access to the Management Advisory Committee of the Department.

The following programmes fall within the remit of the section:

- PLC courses.
- Self-Financing adult education courses at second level.
- Second Chance programmes including VTOS, ALCE, Youthreach, Senior Traveller Training Centre programmes and the Back to Education initiative (NETA, 2003:150).
- Adult Guidance.

The main achievements of the Further Education Section were the issuing of a Green Paper in 1998 and a White Paper in 2000 and securing significant funding for adult education. The section was also involved in the following policy development initiatives:

- A consultation process on the *EU Memorandum on Lifelong Learning*.
- *The Report on the Taskforce on Lifelong Learning*.
- The Consultation Process on promoting anti-racism and inter-culturalism in education.
- A range of EU adult learning strategies.

The Further Education Section is also involved in co-ordination structures such as the National Adult Learning Council (NALC), the Education Disadvantage Committee (EDC) and a range of other Government co-ordination structures. The section has developed support structures since 1992 to help it in its work. The support structure is as follows:

(i) The National Adult Learning Council (NALC)

The establishment of NALC in accordance with the terms of reference laid down in paragraph 10.2 of the White Paper (2000) happened in March 2003. The Council was suspended in early 2004 to facilitate a redrafting of its terms of reference.

(ii) The Inspectorate

The Inspectorate has responsibility for the quality of programme delivery. One inspector has been assigned to adult education.

(iii) National Second Chance Programme Co-Ordinators

The Strategy of appointing National Co-Ordinators to support the Further Education Section on programme delivery started in 1992 with the appointment of a National Co-Ordinator for VTOS. The current state of the support services is outlined in Appendix I (p.54).

There is a considerable investment in the national co-ordination of these programmes. The programmes are at different stages of maturity and development. For example, VTOS and Youthreach are mature, well developed programmes. BTEI and Community Education Facilitation are at the introductory stage and the NCVA support service is in a period of transition.

The governance for Further Education has developed considerably during this period and now the Further Education Section has a voice at senior management meetings within DES. The development of the programmes with assigned Co-ordinators has also been a positive development. However, each programme has separate access, funding, reporting and staffing arrangements. These programmes therefore exist in parallel worlds. This fragments service delivery at national and VEC level. It also has the effect of having staff within VECs identifying with the National Co-ordinators rather than with the VEC adult education service. That is the case irrespective of where the service is located.

*1(b) National Level-Statutory Arrangements for Non-Education
Sector Providers*

The Green Paper on Adult Education (1998) identified ten other Government Departments involved in adult education or training. These are as outlined in Appendix II (p.55). A number of these Departments have executive agencies which deliver training on their behalf - these agencies include FÁS, Teagasc, BIM, Fáilte Ireland and RTE. There is very little, if any, co-ordination between Government Departments on education and training except around social inclusion measures.

1(c) National Level – Voluntary Organisations in the Adult Education Sector
There are three main voluntary organisations involved in promoting adult education at national level – AONTAS, NALA and the IVEA. I will briefly outline the role of each.

The most effective National Voluntary Organisation in the sector is AONTAS. Technically, AONTAS is an advocacy organisation to promote a comprehensive system of adult learning. In reality, AONTAS is also an adult education service provider through the funding it has received from DES and the DSFA.

NALA is an advocacy organisation on behalf of learners with literacy needs. It has achieved much and is widely recognised as a professional, efficient organisation which provides a good service. While technically it is an advocacy body, it is also a delivery organisation through funding from DES and the EU and through its partnership with Waterford Institute of Technology.

IVEA is the representative body for VECs, the main providers of adult education in Ireland. During the period 1990 – 1998 the IVEA was involved in a battle for survival and therefore devoted little time or energy to adult education. Since the future of the VECs and the IVEA has been secured, particularly through the passing of the VEC Amendment Act 2001, that situation has changed significantly. The IVEA embarked on a number of initiatives which should contribute to a much more effective service for all adult learners and for VEC staff in the adult education sector. These initiatives include: a review of its constitution and organisational structure; a strategic review of the organisation; the establishment of a PLC forum, a Literacy forum and an Adult Education Strategic Review Committee; the publication of two policy documents on Refugees, Asylum Seekers and non-nationals and the holding of joint

conferences with other professional management groups in the V.E.C. sector. It is important that the IVEA continues to develop its capacity to provide professional and policy support for its adult learners and staff and the changes outlined will facilitate this happening.

2. Sub-National Level

This section will review the VEC structures and the County Development Boards.

VECs

Each VEC has a responsibility for the provision of adult education under the Vocational Education Acts 1930 – 2001. They are the main providers of adult education within the education system. When adult education and training are considered as a single category the VECs and FÁS are the main providers.

Ad-hoc Adult Education Sub-Committees of VECs were established by the Department of Education and Science in 1984 to co-ordinate the delivery of adult education services within each VEC area. These Committees were criticised in both the Green and White Papers on Adult Education. Both papers imply that these sub-committees were established by the VECs. The reality is that they were established through a Circular Letter issued by DES. That Circular specified the role and membership of ad-hoc Committees. The Department of Education and Science had not reviewed the arrangement until the Green Paper. It is a bit simplistic to criticise VECs in these circumstances.

The VECs typically employ the following staff in delivering their adult education programme: AEOs, ALOs and Literacy Tutors, Community Education Facilitators, Adult Guidance Officers, VTOS Co-Ordinators and Tutors, Youthreach Co-Ordinators and Tutors, Senior Traveller Workshop Managers and Tutors.

The growth in the number of full-time staff and the insistence in the letters authorising appointments for new categories of staff that such staff would have appropriate third level qualifications is an important stepping stone to building the adult education capacity at VEC level. As the NETA report points out co-ordination and coherence is a major issue at sub-national level. The reason for this is that the budgetary, staffing, pay, reporting and learner access mechanisms are different for each programme and as pointed out earlier each pro-

gramme reports to a different national co-ordinator. There is also a second problem at VEC level which mirrors a national problem. Adult education is at the margin of the education service and many VEC and DES staff who are not directly involved know very little about adult education and do not take it into consideration in their day to day work or thinking.

County Development Boards

The County Development Boards were established in 2000 to facilitate the integration of Government funded economic and social initiatives at county and county borough level. The Boards have a special remit in the area of social inclusion. VECs play an active part in the work of County Development Boards and in the social inclusion committee established by these boards. The VEC is one of the statutory bodies represented on the Board. Since the establishment of their regional offices the DES is represented on each CDB.

3. Institutional Level

This is the third tier in the adult education structure. The main institutions involved in the delivery of adult education in VECs are second level schools which provide self-funded adult education and PLC courses. In some instances second level schools also provide Youthreach, VTOS and BTEI courses. The Principal has the overall responsibility for managing all aspects of the school, including adult and further education programmes operating there. In the case of self-financing courses, the Principal is supported by a Director of Adult Education under the terms of Circular Letter 46/00. The method of funding these courses insisted on by the DES is punitive and has the effect of reducing the amount of money available to spend on second level education because receipts generated have to be returned to the Department of Education and Science. In the case of PLCs, the Principal is supported by a staff member with a post of responsibility. If second chance programmes such as Youthreach or VTOS are delivered in a second level school, the Principal will be supported by a co-ordinator for each programme. The challenge for the school and the Principal as manager is to integrate and co-ordinate these services to adults; to provide a seamless education service for the public and to move adult education from the margins to the mainstream at the institutional level.

The second type of institution within VECs is the adult education centre or single programme centres. These tend to have a programme manager or co-ordinator with limited numbers of fulltime staff and few supports.

4. Community Level

Generally, there is no structure at community level operated by VECs except in the larger urban centres or through co-operation with and representation on local ADM Boards. The recent appointment of Community Education Facilitators will help redress that situation.

Conclusion on Present Structures

In my view, the greatest single weakness in the adult education service at all levels is the very poor structural arrangements that are currently in place. They have tended to develop in an ad-hoc way and are usually programme driven. The most disappointing aspect of the structural issue was the failure of the White Paper to tackle the matter in an analytical way. Because it was almost the only aspect of adult education policy contained in the Green Paper that caused controversy the White Paper ducked the structures issue.

The second structural weakness is that the service is staffed overwhelmingly by part-time employees. Both of these weaknesses are interlinked. For example, if there were more full-time and permanent staff they, through their unions and their presence in the system, would bring about an improvement in structures.

Section Two - Future Structures

Future structures should be examined at four levels as I have indicated in the earlier part of this paper. The next section will outline these.

1. National Level

There is a need to complete the educational legislative process initiated by the White Paper in Education 1995 by enacting legislation in the adult education sector. Pending the enactment of legislation the Department of Education and Science should:

- i) Issue a Statutory Instrument to re-establish NALC with its revised terms of reference to enable NALC to become the co-ordination body for delivering national adult education and training policies.
- ii) Establish Local Adult Learning Boards with carefully worked out terms of reference following consultation with the IVEA and other stakeholders.

- iii) Establish clear relationships between the Further Education Section and NALC and between NALC and the LALBs. These will have to be negotiated with all the stakeholders.
- iv) Fundamentally review and restructure the second chance programmes that have been established during the past ten years. I welcome the fact that the Further Education Section has commenced this process as indicated by the Principal Officer, Pauline Gildea. In the review I recommend the following be considered:
- VTOS, Youthreach, STTC, Adult Literacy : The national oversight of these mature second chance services be taken over by the inspectorate and the staff currently employed seconded to the inspectorate. This will help mainstream the programmes. In my view the co-ordination should not become part of the work of NALC because NALC would then become a deliverer of services. If there is a need to continue providing a support service that should be hosted by the IVEA.
 - BTEI, Community Education Facilitation: Because these programmes are delivered by VECs the support service needs to reflect that fact. If this does not happen the capacity of VECs to manage the programmes properly will be severely undermined and the mistakes in the first phase of support services will be repeated. When these programmes are developed the quality assurance of the programmes at national level should become part of the work of the inspectorate. If a support service is needed that service should be located in the IVEA. At sub-national level VECs should be given resources to manage these properly.
 - English for Non-Nationals: There is an urgent need to establish a national forum to make recommendations to DES on policy.
 - FETAC Support Services: Because of the changes in legislation and the onus placed on providers the focus of this service should change to enable all providers meet the requirements under the national qualifications framework and certifying bodies. The role of the support service will be to support all providers in the further education sector.
- v) Implement the provisions of the McIver Report on the management and organisation of PLCs. This is a major task and will need to be phased in.

- vi) Initiate research on self-financing courses offered by all providers in the education sector. These courses have been largely ignored because there is very little data available on them. As a result of the research a strategic plan should be prepared for the development of these courses.

2. Sub-National Level

VECs

It is critically important for VECs to integrate the delivery of adult education into their overall organisational and management structure and ensure that adult education is recognised and treated as a mainstream VEC programme by all VEC staff.

To achieve the mainstreaming of adult education within VECs I suggest the following:

- i) Establish a management team for further education services within each VEC. The management team might have the following membership: the senior manager from each second level college, further education institution and programme (Literacy, Community Education, etc.) and appropriate representation from VEC senior management including administration.
- ii) Through integration within adult education and between adult education and second level significantly increase the number of fulltime staff in the service.
- iii) Provide inservice training and development opportunities for all adult education staff.
- iv) Contribute to and lead the educational dimension of the work of the Social Inclusion Committee of the County Development Board.
- v) Establish area based co-ordination teams based on second level catchment areas which report to the VEC further education management team.

Each VEC needs to start planning now for the establishment of the Local Adult Learning Boards and prepare a strategy to allow it to be both a provider of adult and further education services and a host to the LALBs.

Because adult education is at the margins of the education system bringing it into the mainstream will involve leadership, debate, analysis and hard work.

County Development Boards

Each VEC should adopt the following strategies vis-a-vis the County Development Boards:

- i) Become or continue to be actively involved in the work of the County Development Board. To achieve maximum benefit the VEC should be represented on the board itself by the CEO where this is feasible. The board affords an opportunity to build good working relationships with other statutory bodies.
- ii) Become or continue to be actively involved in the social inclusion committee. The VEC needs to be represented at senior level on the social inclusion committee by either the appropriate Education Officer, AEO or the CEO.
- iii) All of the educational social inclusion measures should be co-ordinated by the VEC and should be managed by a broadly based co-ordinating group.

3. Institutional Level

Adult education will not thrive in Ireland unless proper structures are put in place in educational institutions at both second and third level. Essentially the key issue at both levels is having adult education accepted and recognised by institutional managers as important, and that adult learners are entitled to a properly structured and resourced service. At third level this means a full professor of adult education being appointed in universities and a school of adult education established in each IT. At second level mainstreaming will involve the director of adult education and second chance course managers/coordinators becoming part of the senior management team of the school. In addition, DES has to end the nonsense of the present method of dealing with the finances of self-funding courses. The School Development Planning Initiative needs to hire staff with expertise in adult and further education so that it can promote an integrated model for each school/institution.

VECs have a special responsibility for self-funded adult education within their own second level schools because they are the main providers of these adult education courses nationally. Part of its responsibility is supporting principals in VEC schools to ensure that VEC schools are not just second level schools but are community colleges providing a range of educational services to the whole population. VECs have two further responsibilities in putting structures in place at institutional level. The first is to establish further education colleges as

envisaged in the Mc Iver report with an ethos and structures to reflect the fact that they are serving adults. VECs should not go down the road of establishing PLC colleges only. These colleges need to provide a wide range of adult learning opportunities for adults and benefit from having a range of courses and provision. It is also important for VECs in rural areas, in particular, where there is not a further education college or it is not possible to integrate Youthreach and other second chance courses into the colleges, to establish adult learning centres which integrate these programmes and encourage and support the development of community education.

4. Community Level

To develop structures at community level VECs should in the first instance integrate and co-ordinate the delivery of their own services. Having achieved that they should plan the integration of all adult education and training in their area drawing on the expertise of the community education facilitators. This can happen through coordinating at County Development Board level and through LALBs when they are established. However, there is a need to develop proper structures to ensure co-ordination at community level.

Conclusion

The biggest single task facing adult education is the establishment of proper governance and management structures at four levels:

- National
- Sub-national
- Institutional
- Community

There will be no real development until that happens at all four levels outlined. VECs have a critical role to play at national level through their representative organisation the IVEA and through co-operating with AONTAS and NALA. VECs also have a key role at County, Institutional and Community levels. That role at County and Community level will involve partnership with other providers and a separation of the VECs' function as provider and partner.

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Appendix I

National Co-Ordinators – Second Chance Programmes

| Programme | Name | Location | Reporting Arrangements |
|-----------------------------|---|---|-------------------------------|
| VTOS | Helen Keogh | CDVEC | Admin. VEC Policy DES |
| Youthreach | Dermot Stokes | CDVEC | Admin. VEC Policy DES |
| STCC | Gerard Griffin | Co. Clare VEC | Admin. VEC Policy DES |
| Adult Literacy | John Stewart | NALA | Admin. VEC Policy DES |
| BTEI | Berni Judge | CDVEC | Admin. VEC Policy NALA/DES |
| BTEI | Mary Kett | CDVEC | Admin. VEC Policy DES |
| Community Ed Facilitators | Maureen Kavanagh | AONTAS | Advisory Committee |
| English for Migrant Workers | Martin Berridge | IILT | Management Committee |
| FETAC Support Service | 6 Co-Ordinators One in each VEC listed | CDVEC, Wicklow VEC, City of Cork VEC, City of Galway VEC, Cavan VEC, North Tipperary VEC | Management Committee |

Appendix II

**Government Departments other than DES
Involved in Adult Education and Training**

| | |
|--|----------------------------------|
| Arts, Sport and Tourism ¹ | Agriculture and Food |
| Health and Children | Enterprise, Trade and Employment |
| Communications, Marine and Natural Resources | Justice, Equality and Law Reform |
| Social and Family Affairs | Environment and Local Government |

¹ Current names of government departments used.

Adult Education and the Irish Economy

SEXTON CAHILL

The Irish Economy is at an interesting and dynamic phase of its development and we are faced with major decisions that will impact on the Irish society for many years to come. These decisions are and must be made by all who are in a position to influence.

Over the past year we hear of significant job losses and of migration of basic manufacturing to Eastern Europe and further east to China and the other countries of Asia. To quote the IBEC quarterly economic survey just published:

"More than 32,000 jobs have been lost in the manufacturing industry over the past 3 years and a further decline is likely in the first half of this year. Manufacturing employment is back at levels reached in the late 1996 with falls in the modern sector as well as traditional industry. Policy makers cannot stand idly by as manufacturing jobs relocate to other parts of the globe. There is a certain complacency which rests on the thesis that manufacturing can be outsourced while higher paid employment in R&D, innovation and marketing is retained here in Ireland. Much of the higher income activity can be performed in lower cost countries – a trend that will gather pace if we do not meet the challenge".

We listen to the concerns of the EU about influxes of labour from the new accession states post May of 2004. We listen to the Government telling us we need immigrant labour to sustain our economy. We have 100,000 notified vacancies that we continually struggle to fill. Reliance on visas issued to immigrant labour is growing and many of our hospitality industry jobs are filled by non-nationals. Along with this news, we know that there is in excess of 4%

unemployment – a total of 86,500 persons - and that this is rising. So we live in dynamic times but times we need to mould and influence.

The Historical Context

Economic evolution or revolution is not new and is most certainly not new to these shores. The Ireland of the 1950s is no more. But we have undergone a number of significant evolutions and revolutions since the 1950s. Ireland of the post World War Two was a traditional agricultural economy relying primarily on the small family farm. In the 1960s we had the beginnings of an Industrial Economy under the influence of Sean Lemass. This industrial base was small but had roots in the agricultural background. Things like flour milling and shipping come to mind, along with the co-operatives and the basic processing of the agricultural output. In the 1970s we had the migration of the multi-nationals to Ireland, attracted by the IDA. We had plenty of cheap labour and we could provide a base in Europe and more importantly in the EEC (now the EU) for cheap and low skilled manufacturing. Like the birds in the night, many of these companies are long gone. In the 1980s we began to attract organisations that were interested in a more skilled workforce – and we had that to offer – and we were still a lot less expensive than other parts of the world. I am thinking of the Chemical/Pharmaceutical industries and others, – companies like Syntex and Analog Devices. This second phase of industrialisation was more embedded and longer lasting and many of these companies remain with us today.

In the 1990s we started to see the emergence of the ‘knowledge economy’ and the ‘Dot Com’ companies. The Iona Technology Organisation comes to mind, along with the Intels of this world. In the first decade of this millennium we have been introduced to a new phenomenon – the Service Economy. While we can debate the time of the various evolutions and the impact of each, we need to accept that this evolution is part of the changing Irish Economy.

The Impact of Change

So what is the debate about and what can we do to influence the impact of the changes that are thrust upon us by the evolution?

One key item that we struggle to come to terms with is the fact that there is ‘no job for life’ outside of the civil service and perhaps the semi-state sector. Even the banks are changing in this regard. This means that individually we have to

compete for jobs that are available and that sometimes we will have to compete for jobs with people from other countries as many of the decisions on where to locate businesses are not made in Ireland. It also means that we need individually to ensure that we have the skills and competencies required for this ever changing market place.

There is no doubt that the key influences on our economic growth were and are the IDA, Enterprise Ireland and the Education System along with the fact that we had English as our first language. In addition to these key factors, we had a reasonable rate of returning Irish immigrants who had relevant training and experience abroad and understood the needs of the evolving economy.

We currently have approximately 1.8 million in employment and 86,500 (4.5%) unemployed. That number is rising, as is the number of long term unemployed (1.4%). The 'economic inactive' (12% approx) remain almost static. These are the people in our society who are not currently in the workforce and are aged between 18 and 65, e.g. early retirees, travellers, lone parents and others who are not registered 'at work' but also not registered as unemployed.

Changing Trends

We know that 80% of the new jobs that we will create in the near future will be classified as high skilled. Our future competitiveness and the future of our economy is linked to those in the workforce now and into the future who are capable of more advanced work skills, have higher levels of education and have high levels of core and soft skills. The FÁS/ESRI Survey concludes that no less than three fifths of the new jobs in the next seven years will require higher education, and almost all the rest will require upper secondary education.

So where are these new jobs to be filled from?

Most of those currently in work will be available for work for the next decade at least. Let's examine their capacity to fill these high skilled jobs. The reality is that the number of adult workers in education and training in Ireland is below the EU average. About one third of the existing workforce – 500,000 – does not have a Leaving Certificate. We can conjecture that an individual involved in semi-skilled work or unskilled work who is over 40 years of age is likely to be functionally illiterate. Equally we can conjecture that any person who is involved in low skilled or semi-skilled work and is under 20 years of age is

equally likely to be functionally illiterate. These people will have difficulty with reading and writing and are unlikely to be keyboard or computer literate.

Of those who are in education we have similar concerns – only half of the school leavers obtain a third level qualification and 15% are early school leavers (not having completed lower secondary level and having no vocational qualifications). By way of example, I met a twenty year old recently who was a reasonably competent garage hand, he had a child but was not living with the mother, but was caring for the child on a part time basis. He was unemployed and unable to access apprenticeship or training because he could not read or write, he had left school at 12 according to his mother. I am sure we all know of such dysfunctional situations. But what does the future hold for such people and families?

Looking to the Future

So what we are saying is: We will continue to create jobs. These jobs will be in the knowledge or service economy and will require high levels of education and high skills. Many of those currently in work will not be qualified to fill these jobs. These are the people who are vulnerable to redundancy and losing their jobs as manufacturing moves east to find a lower cost base. Significant numbers of those coming through the education system will be equally unqualified to fill the jobs in the new economy. It is obvious that many of those who are currently unemployed or long term unemployed are not in any serious position to compete for the new jobs that are being created.

So why worry? Why bother? If we do nothing or more importantly if we get it wrong we run the risk of further exaggerating the two tier society in which we now live, and that in turn will have a financial cost, in benefit payments, disadvantage and more importantly, the alienation of many generations.

So what is to be done? Here are some suggestions to open the debate:

- We must move fast to assist everyone onto the FETAC/HETAC learning ladder. We can do this through the accreditation of existing skills, competencies and learning. We can introduce ‘accreditation by doing’.
- We can look at the existing pattern of ‘Employment – Unemployment – Employment’ and move to an ‘Employment – Learning- Employment’ continuum. Why should we pay people to do nothing when we know that learning is the key to future employment? This will require new thinking on

what ‘learning is’ – and a move away from the traditional course and programme structures determined by the academic year.

- In addition to the discussions on ‘lifelong learning’ we need a serious and detailed national debate on who and how we will fund learning. This could lead to existing resources and funding being used differently with the possible introduction of ‘learning accounts’. This debate is hopefully starting in a low-key manner but needs to be tackled urgently with immediate follow up action.
- We could consider some form of compulsory ‘third level’ education for all in line with the continental model. This would mean that everyone on leaving formal education would have a craft or skill and more importantly would be literate and have the soft skills required for integration into the workforce. This would require a major change in thinking, action, methodology, funding and commitment by a significant number of interested parties.

The Government task force which is looking at the Economy of the Future is due to report in the next few months and we wait to see what this has to tell us. But we cannot stand back and hope that the Government will give us the answers. We need to have the debate and more importantly we need to take action now. The fate of the evolving Irish Economy depends on the answers and our future prosperity depends on us getting the answers right.

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The views expressed in this paper are personal and should not be construed as the official views of organisations that I represent or those on whom I serve in an official capacity.

VTOS AND BTEI: The local Adult Education Service moves towards maturity

SEAN CONLON

Introduction

VTOS and BTEI, two major adult education programme strands, are strange sounding acronyms. They have little meaning to the general public but are very significant to adult education practitioners and to adults trying to improve their education and enhance their employment opportunities. In this article I will first look at the origins of both programmes, then compare the programmes as they have developed and continue to operate. The operating context for the programmes within the fledgling adult education service is then considered. The influence of EU funding is briefly noted within the evolving context of publicly funded adult education. Finally, I will offer some reflections on the maturing local adult education service.

Rationale and Origins

The origins of the *Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme* (VTOS) go back to the late 1980s. Piloted in Tallaght and Limerick as the Employment Opportunities Scheme (EOS) VTOS established itself throughout the country in the 1990s. In 1990 unemployment in Ireland was approaching 20%. The statistics showed clearly that those with the weakest educational levels were the least likely to access or retain employment. The two-year, full time VTOS became a vehicle for assisting long term unemployed adults access the education that they needed to get work. It also had the beneficial side effect of taking a large number of people off the live register.

There have always been two ways of delivering the VTOS programme. Core VTOS consists of stand alone groups operating an independent educational programme, usually within a solely adult education environment. Dispersed

VTOS allows programme places to be located within schools and become integrated with the other educational activities of the school especially the PLC programme. Both models continue to operate successfully.

The *Back to Education Initiative* (BTEI) emerged in the *National Development Plan 2000 – 2006* as a response to the fact that Ireland is “lagging significantly behind other countries in terms of the proportion of the population aged 25-64 with less than upper secondary education.” The NDP goes on ... “The proportion is 50% for Ireland, compared with 18% for Norway, 19% for Germany, 26% in Sweden, 34% in Denmark. Within the labour force alone, there are 658,700 people over the age of 15 with less than upper secondary education. In addition, the International Adult Literacy Survey points to adult participation in continuing education and training in Ireland (22%) also being considerably below the European average of 34% and the best performer, Sweden at 54%” (p.100). The need is highlighted in the NDP for much greater flexibility in the delivery and timing of educational provision to enable it to be combined with family responsibilities and employment.

Learning for Life, the White Paper on Adult Education (2000) commits significant resources to the development of part-time options under the BTEI and suggests that “It will provide opportunities to return to learning for adults and provide a re-entry route for those in the workplace who wish to upgrade their skills in line with emerging needs” (p.93).

The EU Memorandum on Lifelong Learning (2000) focuses on “promoting active citizenship and promoting employability” (p.5). It encourages education and training systems “to adapt to individual needs and demands rather than the other way around” (p.8). The Memorandum goes on... “Employability is obviously a key outcome of successful learning, but social inclusion rests on more than having paid work. Learning opens the door to building a satisfying and productive life, quite apart from a person’s employment status and prospects” (p.9).

Compare and Contrast

The Back to Education Initiative, in contrast to the VTOS programme, was developed at a time of high economic growth and high employment. The challenge in our new knowledge society was no longer simply to get people into work. More people than ever were at work. The challenge now was to provide a

flexible part-time system that allowed both unemployed, under-employed and workers to avail of quality educational programmes at times and venues to suit their varied needs and time schedules. The Department of Education and Science Circular Letter 45/99 (Management Structure for VTOS) comments that there is a “growing need for diversity and flexibility in provision and mode of delivery to meet the needs of early school leavers, young people and adults with low qualifications, and the long term unemployed in promoting the overarching objective of social inclusion”.

Clearly VTOS, the pre-existing programme, was regarded as an unlikely vehicle to meet this challenging demand. VTOS was a full time programme. In the new Celtic Tiger Ireland, fewer adults, it was thought, would be in a position to avail of full time programmes. VTOS operated either in the fledgling Adult Education Centres or in schools. While the former might be regarded as reasonably flexible institutions, schools with their more rigid timetables and opening hours, were unlikely to possess the levels of flexibility required by this new programme.

In late 2002 BTEI began to be rolled out across the country. By the end of 2003 the shape of BTEI on the ground was emerging clearly. Hundreds of part time accredited programmes had been initiated and thousands of students were availing of certified courses relevant to their needs. Programmes operated in a wide range of settings, including adult education centres and schools. In addition, programmes also ran in facilities owned by other agencies, including health services and partnership companies. The community strand of BTEI with its 600 reserved places has also encouraged groups to operate creative niche programmes in community settings.

Operating Context

Both BTEI and VTOS programmes operate significantly within the fledgling local adult education service operated mainly by the Vocational Education Committees. Over the past decade the VEC adult education service has, in virtually every county and city area, grown to become a more adequate and considerably more learner driven service.

To set VTOS and BTEI in context, it is worth noting the journey that the VEC service has taken in the last decade or so. From a service that primarily organised self-financing non-accredited evening classes, largely of the leisure and hobby

variety, the VEC adult education service is now focused primarily on social inclusion issues. 95% of adult education budgets are now spent on compensatory or second chance programmes for adults of low educational attainment.

This compensatory role has grown inexorably especially since the early nineties. This agenda was taken up willingly by VECs who recognised that the hobby and leisure emphasis of much of its adult education programme, while important for local community building and liberal personal development, would never play a significant role in addressing social disadvantage or low educational attainment.

Adult literacy needs began to be recognised in the late 1970s but no funding was available until the arrival of the ALCE (Adult Literacy and Community Education) budgets following the Kenny Report of 1983. However, these original budgets were so small as to make hardly any difference to literacy practice, which remained a largely voluntary activity until the expansion of the late 1990s.

VTOS was among the earliest programmes, emerging with Youthreach, the programme for early school leavers, in the late eighties. Gradually over the intervening years other programme strands have emerged and created the local adult education service as it exists today. Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) Programmes also developed significantly through the 1990s. Adult literacy expanded hugely following the publication by the OECD of the International Adult Literacy Survey in 1997. An Adult Guidance service began to be piloted in some areas in 2000 and has at present expanded to 24 areas in the country. The much-heralded Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) finally emerged at local level in late 2002 and began to roll out in 2003. Community Education Facilitators (CEF) were appointed to every area in 2003.

The adult education service at county or city level is primarily funded through these discreet programmes, each with its own budget, held together in a more or less coherent way by the local VEC. The officer who manages this local service is in most areas the Adult Education Organiser (AEO). The AEO attempts to hold together these programme strands as well as other projects and school based self-funded courses and maintains cooperative networks with other service providers. This in general is the shape of the local publicly funded adult education service.

Challenges to the Local Service

When you are an actor in the middle of the local adult education drama it is difficult to maintain a clear view of how the service might be managed in a more rational and coherent way. Clearly, what exists works. However, there is plenty anecdotal evidence that suggests that it could be working better in the interest of the learner and that the enormous resources now being spent on the broad area of adult education could yield better results at local level.

At present it is too easy for any one programme strand, including VTOS and BTEI, to operate as an independent entity, working in relative autonomy, offering its own programme with little reference to the other programme strands going on often under the same roof. From the learner's perspective accessing the service as it exists in most places can be quite a challenge. Access routes are sometimes not clear. Getting a service can be dependent on personal contacts rather than clear procedures. Knowing someone on the course may ensure quicker access than reading the brochures.

Until recently professional guidance was unavailable for almost everyone outside the large PLC colleges. The advent of an adult guidance service in many areas has provided the learner with a much more professional service before entry, during the programme and in terms of progression. More than any other initiative, however, the guidance programme also highlights the deficiencies of the existing service. The glaring gaps in programme availability from one area of the country to another become more visible. The guidance service also highlights infrastructure deficiencies in terms of transportation, childcare and access as well as the poor availability of progression options for learners who have completed programmes.

The challenge in terms of local service coherence is not merely to get programme strands into regular dialogue with each other and other service providers, but to create a strategic vision for the entire local service. The VEC, usually in the person of the AEO, spends a great deal of time in attempting this with varying levels of success.

European Funding

European funding has been an enormous impetus and support in the development of innovative, targeted educational programmes for adult learners. Without European Social Fund (ESF) support in the late 1980s, VTOS could

not have developed. VTOS attracted European Social Funding from its inception until 2000. Since then the programme is entirely state supported. BTEI by contrast receives substantial European funding. This reality has significantly influenced the fate of the two programmes, effectively capping the development of VTOS since 2000, while allowing BTEI to expand.

European social funding has kick started and continues to fund many of the programmes in the adult educational landscape. However, it is time to examine the effects of this kind of funding on the development of the local service. Funding the local service through discreet programme strands clearly has the potential to encourage fragmented local development. Many of these programme strands in turn are funded significantly by Europe. Accompanying audit requirements demand clear lines of demarcation or even ideally a physical separation of local programmes and services. While this approach makes sense to European auditors it often makes a nonsense of local strategies which seek to maximise resources through active cross programme collaboration, sharing and joint planning. The sharing of buildings, utility bills and other costs, a process critically necessary as the service seeks to maximise its resources is apparently at odds with EU audit requirements.

Final Thoughts

Adult learners approaching the local adult education service care little about acronyms like VTOS or BTEI or PLC. Their need is deeply felt and all they want of the service is to be welcomed and matched to the most appropriate educational programme. The need for adequate professional guidance and learner support in this context is very clear. In an ideal world a mature adult education service would always act in this way, in the very best interests of the student.

What might this mature adult education service of the future look like? Clearly, the nationally determined general mission of a publicly funded local adult education service will focus on educational disadvantage in all its manifestations. Many different target groups including unemployed, low literate and ethnic groups will continue to be the focus of this mission. This broad vision will then need to be translated into a reality relevant to each local area. This approach must involve real local decision-making and partnership in order to establish priorities and allocate budgets. Current funding practice does not encourage this more coherent approach.

When learners approach the local adult education service they should expect to experience a welcoming point of contact, a guidance service that includes assessment, consideration of a menu of opportunities, learner support, certification as well as clear progression options. The learner should have a choice of part-time or full-time programmes that might include VTOS or BTEI or PLC or some other programme. Finally, if no appropriate course is available within the existing programmes then referral procedures to other agencies like Local Employment Services, FÁS or other providers should apply.

In order to provide a responsive and professional local adult education service the national policy, which focuses on educational disadvantage and social inclusion, needs to remain firmly in place. At local level this national policy must to be made more real through the establishment of the Local Adult Learning Boards (LALB). These Boards, promised in the White Paper of 2000, need firstly to be created and then facilitated to generate a vision and a plan that will create learning programmes more in tune with local needs.

In time the LALB will create its own menu of learning programmes in line with both national policy and local priorities. While national certification increasingly determines the shape of many programmes it is likely that as the LALB becomes more mature and comfortable in its role, programmes for educationally disadvantaged adults like VTOS and BTEI, will blend into more locally devised and responsive programmes. Thus targeted programmes bearing acronyms like VTOS and BTEI that initiated training courses when the local adult education service barely existed may fade as the Local Adult Learning Boards come to maturity as brokers of their own educational destiny.

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Accreditation within Adult Education: Reflections and views of local tutors

DEIRDRE KEYES

Introduction

The perspectives in this piece reflect the current experiences and thoughts from Dun Laoghaire VEC's Adult Education Service's literacy, second chance and community education provision as we move towards more accreditation of programmes. This move has been prompted by a number of significant changes and interventions within adult education over the last number of years, particularly the National Qualifications Act and Framework, the introduction of the Back to Education Initiative, Workplace Literacy initiatives such as Return to Learning, the setting up of the Adult Education Guidance Service and the appointment of Community Education Facilitators. In this context it was considered that how the service moves forward had to involve conscious reflection, evaluation and planning, not just with programme planners and administrators but also equally with tutors and learners.

At the outset of the BTEI in 2001, a process of informal consultation and reflection with tutors took place in relation to moving our adult learners towards certification. This was part of a wider process within the organisation to address the professional development needs of our tutors in a number of key areas. A series of focus group sessions were held with key programme staff and tutors on the issues of accreditation specifically. The views expressed in this process have informed many of the perspectives in this piece.

Why a Process of Reflection?

It is so infrequent in adult education that we take the time to gain the views and reflections of our tutors; they are the lost species of adult education yet so central to the teaching and learning process. Many tutors within adult education

see themselves at the fringes of organisations and outside of the establishment of 'teaching' (Collins, 1991). When tutors' views and experiences are considered there is so much to gain in terms of improving the quality of delivery and gaining insights into particular issues within the wider sphere of adult education. In his analysis of effective adult education institutions, one of the main criteria identified by Kidd as central to the quality of delivery is that of a democratic decision making process involving both tutors and learners (Kidd, 1973). Not involving tutors to the extent to which we should is perhaps symptomatic of a more fundamental issue within adult education, primarily the lack of attention that has traditionally been paid to issues of curriculum, methodology and process. In reviewing philosophies of adult education, Elias and Merriam make reference to how little information we actually have about the quality of the teaching process that is needed within adult education practice while at the same time no one disputes the need for very skilled teachers to effectively meet many of its objectives (Elias & Merriam, 1980).

Over the past number of years, enormous efforts have gone into programme development and putting the necessary systems in place to ensure delivery at a variety of levels and with various target groups; but to what extent has there been a focus on what is actually happening in the teaching/ learning situation?

For many in adult education we are often left with a feeling that issues of quantity surpass issues of quality in terms of evaluating what is important. Lindeman, one of the greatest pioneers of adult education, believed of education that by merely giving 'the same dose to more individuals', its true meaning and spirit would be lost. He believed firmly in an adult education that experimented with the qualitative sides of education, exploring new methods and new concepts (Lindeman, 1926, p.7).

Ohliger speaks about standard brand adult education institutions offering 'the same to more'. He believes that within these institutions we need to develop the commitment of a reasonable number of adult educators that can discover ways and means of creating more liberating and relevant learning situations and environments. This can only be done by engaging adult educators within institutions in dialogue about the goals and values of their work. Tutors can make significant contributions to the dialogue on adult education particularly when change of any sort needs to be facilitated (Ohliger, 1974).

Accreditation does create fears, many misguided, in relation to issues of quality versus quantity, subject versus student centred and the outcomes versus process dimensions of adult education. Leirman describes adult education over the last number of decades as swinging like a pendulum between differing schools of thought on these issues, but within these swings a competency based model has emerged, not just in response to the increased need for accountability, but equally in response to the increasing individualisation of society and by implication education (Leirman 1981). He makes the important point that:

“even if adult education were to be de-institutionalised and de-professionalized, one may wonder whether the central goal of adult education – to enable adults to get a better insight into their personal and societal situation and to provide them with skills to act upon their situation, would in the long run be better realised” (ibid. p.11).

The only way to appreciate and understand this, he believes, is for practitioners to be given the opportunity to reach in-depth insights through critical analysis and reflection. It is important therefore to engage tutors in discussion, debate and evaluation and really promote the concept of reflective practitioners within our services.

Finally, accreditation is firmly set within the wider national and European adult education policy context. The White Paper on Adult Education, *Learning for Life*, recommends that an integrated approach to the development of an accreditation strategy be developed. It makes reference to the Green Paper’s recommendation on flexible approaches in line with learner needs. It is important therefore that we consider and implement the most effective strategy for doing so (*Learning for Life*, 2000). The enactment of the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999, led to the establishment of the National Qualifications Authority in 2001, its principle objectives being to establish a framework of qualifications and the facilitation of access, transfer and progression at all stages within the lifelong learning process (Towards a National Framework of Qualifications, 2002). One of the central values and principles, which underpin the framework, is that of quality, not just in relation to the setting of overall standards but as an overarching element in its implementation.

Considerations for Tutors

The starting point for tutors is to acknowledge some of the inherent tensions that exist within the concept of accreditation. During our own reflections, one of our tutors very aptly stated:

'Yes, it was good to state why not accreditation? Now I feel better about discussing and opening up to the question of why accreditation?'

The primary tension that existed for our tutors was that of a perceived conflict between a student/learner led curriculum and a subject led one; they perceived accreditation as taking the major focus away from the student to the subject, something which they saw as in direct conflict with their ideological position on adult education. Whereas they would have worked from a 'curriculum' previously, it was one that was negotiable and very much driven by the learner's needs. In talking about the dominant ideological emphases of different groups of teachers located within the hierarchical structure of the education system, Keddie believes the view held by adult educators comes from the principle of voluntary attendance by most adult learners and by implication the importance of responding to the demands of adults as they come to class, not beforehand – our reflections would certainly concur with this (Keddie, 1980).

Much of the resistance and fear had a lot to do with the tutors' perception of themselves as not being subject specialised. Their professional frame of reference was that of their commitment to responding to the students' needs. Comments such as, *'Let the learners tell us what they want, they will direct what happens and we will respond to that'* came up time and time again as we analysed how programmes were running.

Most of our tutors accepted the point that it is perhaps a luxury to consider an education experience that does not involve some element of certification, structure and sequential learning. Despite acknowledging this, they also had some learner related concerns which have been expressed within a number of other critiques of accreditation within adult education. These were mainly in relation to learner autonomy; feelings of them having less say in the direction, content and timing of their learning and becoming more like passive consumers as opposed to active participants (Clark, 1981, Hall, 1975, Heaney, 2000, Mayo and Thompson, 1991, Pennington, 1981). This tension between the passivity and autonomy of the learner is fundamental to the Freirean view

of the teacher as someone in an equal relationship with the learner, engaging in a process of dialogue and problem posing as opposed to what he saw as the impositional nature of more traditional forms of education (Freire, 1971).

Our tutors, although maybe not aware of the theoretical foundations of self-directed learning, had a very strong commitment to the andragogical process as espoused by Knowles, with self-directedness as its core (Knowles, 1989). It may well be observed, however, that there is an over dependency on this process and perhaps an over simplistic view of it that does not take into account some of the complexities involved in adults being truly self-directed in any given learning situation (Jarvis, 1987).

Considerations for Learners

There were also more specific concerns raised in terms of the type of learner that enters our service at this level, often referred to as 'non traditional' adult learners, most of whom have had little or no formal education experience and for those that have had this experience, it has often been very negative.

The central question for our tutors was 'What type of learner does this system suit'? It has been suggested that centralised systems of accreditation standards and curricula may act as barriers to working class participation in education programmes (Grayson, 1995; Mayo and Thompson, 1995; Thompson, 1980). At the same time, other research has reported that adults in basic education programmes perform better when they have a clear idea of what is expected of them than they do if the desired outcome is unclear (Mezirow et al, 1975).

Will all adult education be delivered within an accreditation framework in the future? Our tutors wanted reassurance that there would still be room within our service for a plurality of approaches to deal with and respond to the diversity and plurality of learners. Some of the tutors raised the issue of the 'unquantifiable learning' that can take place, of progression that can neither be defined nor captured, voicing the concern that, *'In the end of the day many of our learners just want to learn how to express themselves and they really do not care about a certificate'*. The critical challenge for the local adult education service will be to make provision flexible and supportive enough to facilitate all learners, particularly those who wish to enter the first level of accreditation.

Implementation Issues

In many cases it was not the concept of accreditation that was at issue for the tutors but the actual certification process and the framework within which it takes place and is delivered. National standards of performance have been established and must be met; without enriching the teaching process we could be in danger of excessive narrowing of focus. Some of the key questions which have arisen in this context have been: Are we assuming that most areas in adult education can be accredited? Are we actually deepening the context of students' learning? Will adult students be given the time to work through the profundity of issues to make connections and understand issues in a meaningful way? (Grayson, 1995). If local adult education services are to continue to deliver good adult education these must be considered. Standardised curricula and outcomes are likely to reinforce traditional teacher, student roles and encourage standardised approaches.

Tutors and learners must be facilitated to regain the locus of control of the learning situation while at the same time working within a particular framework. Skills to deliver in this way may need to be developed and supported and cannot be taken for granted. Some limited research on this from the UK perspective showed that working creatively with accreditation, particularly at the pre-access level, was welcomed by learners. Although many of the programme objectives had very low and limited expectations of learners, by taking the time to develop the outcomes in a more meaningful way, some of the frustrations that both tutors and learners were feeling were smoothed away (Ross, 1995).

This places a lot of responsibility in terms of quality of delivery on the tutors. Fundamental to this will be their underlying attitude or orientation. In their interpretation of the tutor/ learner role they can create a dependency role or otherwise (Hadley, 1981). It may be easier to deliver within a dependency model and more efficient in terms of their time. Developmental work of this nature is not without practical implications.

This raises an interesting point in terms of how adult education tutors actually see their roles. Much adult education practice to date has taken place in the absence of a certification and accreditation framework. That is not to say that it has been without outcome, but it has been without clearly defined sets of criteria in relation to named competencies. Within a primarily meritocratic education system, it is inevitable that this type of adult education will have a low

priority (Keddie, 1980). This most likely is because of the minimal contribution it has made to conferring qualifications. Historically, this has contributed to adult education's low status and by implication has affected the professional identity of those delivering it. Within an accreditation system, tutors consider that more is expected of them and they want to deliver good quality teaching. We are moving our programmes from a more ad hoc type of provision to a more streamlined and formalised one. The key question is should we not also be taking this view of our tutors and considering a suitable model for their professional development that is equally resourced and planned for?

The final issue from the perspective of the learner which was raised was one which had a more practical application and wider implication for all service providers – do we actually have the necessary progression routes in place locally to enable learners to go forward? Within our own service mandate we can only take our learners so far; is there the full compliment of necessary provisions locally to make the aspiration of 'Access Transfer and Progression a reality for all?' (National Qualifications Authority, 2003). In presenting arguments against accreditation in the British context, Ross makes the point that we need to advocate for more coherence on the issue, both to address problems of continuity and purpose within programmes and following on from them. Teams of tutors need to work together as do service providers. He places responsibility for this within the adult education services themselves (ibid, 1981).

Moving Forward

Elias and Merriam have stated that 'radical thought is a good antidote to complacency', believing that critiquing their current practice can enable adult educators to question the basic thrust of their effort and this is ultimately good for the service (1980, p. 171). Our experiences would lead us to concur with this view. New ideas and innovations in education, in particular adult education, will flounder unless there is more conceptual clarity at all levels (Lawson, 1975). Conceptual clarity within adult education is a rather elusive phenomenon and confusions have led to many practical difficulties and deep divides, the danger is that we overlook these and continue to move forward. Accreditation is a contested area within adult education and we must acknowledge this.

The theory and practice of adult education has been shaped by something which has unevenly filtered down. As a result practitioners are struggling with

ethical, intellectual and practical questions to the extent that the real meaning of adult education has become blurred (Field, 1991). We, as providers, in partnership with our tutors, need to seize the moment and determine the quality of provision. Whatever the position we adopt on the issue of accreditation, it must be held critically and as a result of a process of examining and evaluating, perhaps rejecting or modifying what has been previously practised and understood. As Freire himself stated on the process of change within education:

“The shock between yesterday which is losing relevance but still seeking to survive, and a tomorrow which is gaining substance, characterizes the phase of transition as a time of announcement and a time of decision. Only however, to the degree that the choices result from a critical perception of the contradiction are they real and capable of being transformed in action” (Freire, 1973, p. 7).

Throughout any process of change, our tutors can feel marginalised and threatened in terms of their particular professional identity and purpose. It may present the best of them with the impetus for leaving. The process of reflective practice opens up new possibilities for working within organisations, helping to develop both a sense of our limitations and our future potential. Within the adult education service we must try to enable our tutors to remain ideologically centred while at the same time respond in a professional way to new methodological and institutional demands.

Our process was informal and in many ways reactive; for it to be truly of value it needs to be supported by academic effort and documented research. We have not paid enough attention to this. How we capture these valuable insights in a more structured way and perhaps within a more formal research framework is our next big challenge.

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Adult Literacy Then and Now: An ALO's Perspective

GRETTA VAUGHAN

It would be easy to forget at this point, given that Adult Literacy has attained a status and respectability within the Adult Education sector previously undreamt of, that it was once a movement, campaigning on a platform of human rights.

The Past

As a professional educator who moved from the formal to the non-formal sector in the mid-eighties the lack of status and recognition being afforded to the issue of adult literacy at the time presented a formidable challenge. What came as an even greater shock was that in most areas of the country adult basic education was operating as a charitable function. The most important event in the calendar year of many schemes was the flag day where money was raised for the operating costs of what was essentially a function of the state. Huge energy was being channelled into activities which, by presenting learners as the deserving poor, compounded the stigma already attached to adult literacy. It reinforced the status quo and diverted attention away from the real issue of state responsibility. After all, the very least that should be expected of the state's education system was that its citizens would be equipped with the 3R's on leaving school. Even the most pessimistic of us never imagined the extent of its failure. It was imperative that the thinking within and outside of the movement be challenged. It wasn't aided by the fact that the whole area was cloaked in denial. Those of us working on the ground felt intuitively that we were merely accessing the tip of the iceberg. We remembered our own schooling and the boys and girls relegated to the back of the class in every classroom, second-class citizens. They were the ones frequently kept at home to look after the sick parent or the new arrival. They took on menial jobs at an early age because every penny

counted and as soon as they got the chance they left school behind them, glad of the escape, wanting only never to go back.

Those who did find the courage to go back in adulthood were so low in self-esteem and self-confidence that it soon became apparent that lack of literacy skills was only the presented symptom of a much larger set of emotional, social, economic and educational issues. What the literacy scheme could offer was one hour a week of one-to-one tutoring by a volunteer tutor. Many of the volunteers were emerging either poorly trained or in some cases with no training at all. They were, however, deeply committed people who empathised with the adult learner and understood the human side of the issue. Many lives were changed for the better and tremendous work was carried out around the kitchen table in the homes of either the volunteer or the learner by people whose only reward was the satisfaction of seeing at first hand the development of human potential. Success, however, was hit and miss, very unstructured and the drop out rate was enormous. Failure was too costly as the likelihood of those adults ever again returning to learning was remote and the whole experience only served to compound their own sense of failure.

The Role of NALA

Throughout the whole era of under-resourcing and marginalisation from the eighties through the nineties the work of the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) was crucial. It not only kept the show on the road but provided support, encouragement, recognition and training to practitioners working in the field. In all aspects of its work it embodied the principles of good practice from which all of us took example and applied that practice in our own work. Most significantly it did not prescribe. It recognised the knowledge and skills of those doing the work and drew on that expertise to develop models of good practice which were then disseminated throughout the sector. As a democratic organisation, it kept in touch with the needs of workers and learners through its AGM and assigned resources to meet those needs. It worked tirelessly for the inclusion of all voices so that at the end of the day ownership of each process rested with the members. The NALA training manual "New Ideas for Training in Adult Literacy Work" is one such example of how that process delivered for the organisation. NALA as an agency drew attention, raised awareness and nibbled away at the shroud of apathy which cloaked the issue. It provided a forum for practitioners to come together, air their views and feel less isolated. In a nutshell it was a major source of empowerment for learners and practitioners alike.

The economic upturn of the mid to late nineties and the need for a skilled workforce drew attention to that sector of society which was underskilled and underutilised in the economy. The OECD report in 1997 of the International Literacy Survey highlighted that we were more or less at the bottom of the pile with regard to the literacy level of our citizens, given that it found that 25% were functioning at the very lowest level of literacy and a further 30% were below the level for effective functioning in society. Embarrassment all around in the education system as the agenda changed subtly from being a human rights issue to an economic one of sustaining progress. The Green Paper *Adult Education in an era of Lifelong Learning* published in 1998 placed literacy firmly at the centre of adult education provision and paved the way for the Adult Literacy Development fund. It was the first major injection of funding into provision for the adult literacy sector and initiated a series of profound changes from which there can be no turning back. Even if there is a downturn in the economy and funding may not be as readily available as heretofore it can never again be said that the problem doesn't exist. That myth at least has been laid to rest and the state has taken responsibility both for prevention and remediation in the area. The White Paper 2000 *Learning for Life* set in train the National Adult Literacy Strategy and pointed out the professionalisation of the sector as being a key factor in future development.

Adult Literacy has been better placed than almost any other area of adult education in this regard. It has from the outset placed huge importance on the whole notion of training for its workers. Even in the days when delivery was haphazard there was always an acknowledgement that there was a body of knowledge and a set of skills that had to be acquired by tutors before they commenced tutoring. The development of the NALA pack 'New Ideas for Training in Adult Literacy Work', arising out of a conference of practitioners in Tramore, Co. Waterford in 1992, gave schemes a framework and a model from which they could draw. The partnership of NALA and Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT) in developing an accreditation process based on this model has ensured that the ethos and values on which the literacy movement was founded could be maintained and developed. Many schemes throughout the country have succeeded in having their locally developed training programmes approved by NCEA/HETAC¹ through this process thereby enabling their tutors to gain professional accreditation. Organisers and tutors can gain

¹HETAC : The Higher Education and Training Awards Council.

professional qualifications at certificate and diploma level through the NALA/WIT Accreditation Project and many have already done so. It is thanks to the vision and commitment of literacy practitioners and other stakeholders at national and local level in the early 1990s that the accreditation route was in place when the tide came in. This has dramatically improved the quality and type of service available to the learner. It has also ensured the retention in the sector of the many committed volunteers both at organiser and tutor level who kept things going when times were tough and in the process developed strategies, resources and methods which were exemplary.

The Role of the Volunteer

The volunteer ethos has served the adult literacy sector and the state very well. But do they know it? Now that schemes are in a position, due to increased funding, to acquire paid professionals to do the job, it would appear that less value is being placed on the voluntary input. Yes, the pool of volunteers is shrinking; yes, huge time, energy and resources have to go into the recruitment and training of volunteers; yes, they have to be skilfully managed; but the payback to the learner in terms of the empathy, the commitment, going the extra mile, the willingness and the enthusiasm which is part and parcel of what the volunteer brings to a scheme is irreplaceable. It also empowers people in their own communities to take ownership of an issue and to be politicised by it. Society and the concept of lifelong learning can only be enhanced and enriched by maintaining the voluntary aspect of the literacy service. The fact that each scheme now has the wherewithal to progress the volunteer on to a professional status will enable the twin gods of value for money and ethos to be justly served. It is one aspect of the Adult Literacy Service which we cannot afford to lose.

There has been a huge increase in the numbers accessing literacy provision since the Development fund was put in place in 1998. Recruitment is now much more strategic and targeted and operates through Referral networks and partnerships with other agencies such as FÁS, Health Boards, Local Authorities and Area Development groups among others. This has led to an increase in daytime provision and intensive learning programmes. It has also led to a broadening out of the range and type of programmes available under the umbrella of Basic Education with many schemes now being involved in workplace learning and the delivery of Family Learning programmes.

Family Learning

The concept of Family Learning is a very welcome development in that the cyclical nature of the issue is being recognised and addressed. Again, schemes are using expertise developed over decades of front line delivery in developing and sharing programmes which address needs of locally based groups. However, much more dialogue needs to take place between the formal system at primary level and the non-formal adult literacy sector if major inroads are to be made in the area of prevention through family learning programmes and if the concept of lifelong learning is to become a reality.

It is an issue which could be taken up by a broker at national level such as NALA in the development of an understanding which could lead to a productive partnership. NALA's role as broker at national level has worked very effectively in the past in such areas as the FÁS/VEC Return to Education programme and the Local Authority/VEC Return to Learning course. These programmes have proven a major success at local level and enabled schemes to access, target and recruit learners in a structured way who, in the past, had been the most difficult to reach and who were unlikely of their own volition to seek provision. It also raised the status of the work being done in that through the intensive nature of the programmes tutors were now able to bring learners through the accreditation process. Many learners who never dreamed of achieving any sort of qualification have emerged from these short term programmes with upwards of two and three NCVA/FETAC modules and a new sense of motivation and willingness to progress. Such programmes also established the principle of employer responsibility in the area of training and development for employees and furnished schemes with a blueprint for dialogue and negotiation in the wider workplace.

The Role of the ALO

So what has become of the ALO in all of this? The ALOs who were up and doing long before an official decision was made with regard to who they were and what they did. The ALOs who managed, recruited, trained, matched, monitored, listened, learned and tutored, who did the job whatever it was because it needed to be done and who didn't ask, what price? The ALOs who astonished even themselves at a NALA forum in Killaloe in 1991 when formulating a job description in finding that the list of tasks was endless. Well, the list of tasks certainly hasn't shrunk but the nature of the job has certainly changed. Everything is much more planned and strategic now while the management of

budgets, staff and resources has become the primary function in a service which has developed into an integral part of the institution of the VEC. Change has always been part of the territory of Adult Literacy given the developmental nature of the work but the influence of the ALO in initiating and formulating that change and development has been eroded.

The development of the ALO network in 1996 gave a much needed lifeline of networking and communications to organisers affording them an opportunity to exchange ideas, communicate information and disseminate models of good practice. The Adult Literacy Organisers Association (ALOA) at national level provides a voice for organisers through the networks structure and ensures that issues and ideas at grassroots level are communicated upwards and at the very least receive a hearing on DES committees in areas affecting basic education. This is a structure which needs to be strengthened and supported by the DES and by VECs. Many ALOs find it difficult to contribute to the ALOA network structure due to the demands of work on the ground. They need to be facilitated and enabled to contribute to the network. The ALO's role in the future development of the literacy service is crucial and it can only enhance the quality of provision if their contribution through this avenue is supported and encouraged.

Many of the new initiatives which now impinge on the work of the Adult Literacy service are currently being developed outside of it and the values and ethos which served the movement and its members so well are undoubtedly under threat. However, it must be remembered that the guiding principles embodied in the Quality Framework developed by NALA encapsulate the ethical framework on which the service is based and provide the yardstick by which new initiatives can be measured. What must not be forgotten is that the whole thing began with the basic education needs of learners. They have to remain centre stage otherwise we will have lost our way. At the end of the day it's the quality of what emerges when the tutor and learner meet which is important. Whether that takes place around the kitchen table with a volunteer tutor, or in a state of the art adult learning centre, if the quality of that engagement doesn't deliver for the learner then everything else is meaningless. It has to continue to deliver what we have promised literacy will do: that is, to "enable people to understand and reflect critically on their life circumstances with a view to exploring new possibilities and initiating constructive change."¹²

I feel sure that W.B. Yeats would forgive me if in conclusion I take the liberty of paraphrasing some of his work as I believe it applies to many learners: *They have spread their dreams under our feet; tread softly, because we tread on their dreams.*

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²N.A.L.A. definition: "What is Literacy?" in NALA Strategic Plan 2002 – 2006 Dublin: NALA.

Book Reviews

Gender and Learning

*A study of the learning styles of women and men
and their implications for further education and training*

PEADAR KING AND SHEILA O'DRISCOLL WITH
STEPHANIE HOLDEN

(Shannon Curriculum Development Centre, pp.143, 2002)

This review will examine **Gender and Learning - A study of the learning styles of women and men and their implications for further education and training**, written by Peadar King and Sheila O'Driscoll with Stephanie Holden. The research report was commissioned by AONTAS, on behalf of the Further Education Section of the Department of Education and Science to examine men's and women's different learning styles and their implications for the provision of education and training.

The researchers remit is to help us explore the different learning styles adopted by the male and female students within this study. They undertake this through the use of both a qualitative and quantitative approach with a group of fifty men and fifty women involved in a learning programme who prior to the course had achieved less than upper second level education. The authors also seek to identify these differences; to examine their specific needs in relation to access to learning; to identify models of good practice and to make recommendations on the implications of their findings for the provision of further education and training. During the course of their research the authors King, O'Driscoll and Holden (p.27) '...uncovered a dearth of studies on gender-based cognitive and learning

theories.’ Therefore, they hope that this work can contribute to our understanding of how *if at all* men and women learn differently (p.28).

The research findings are delineated in a clear and concise manner over seven chapters. Chapter One contextualises the research and briefly outlines the contents of the following six chapters. Chapter Two provides the theoretical framework within which the experience of adult education can be examined. It begins by outlining a number of issues that act as deterrents and barriers to adults wishing to engage in education, which have been highlighted for attention by the Department of Education and Science in both their Green (1998) and White (2000) Papers on Adult Education.

Chapter Two also gives us the framework to look at how men and women learners develop their traditional gendered roles within society and how these roles continue to be maintained within hegemonic educational discourse. In addition, this chapter also looks at two competing theoretical perspectives ‘critical theory’ and ‘functionalism’ which according to Clancy (1986 and 1995) ‘...occupy opposite ends of the ideological spectrum, (and) dominate Irish educational discourse within the discipline of sociology’ (p.13). On the one hand ‘critical theorists see education as a process rather than a product’ (p.13) which encourages us to deconstruct hegemonic educational discourse. This process in turn challenges us to look beyond imposed social, cultural, economic and normative constraints in order to ‘...imagine and pursue a world that is free from patriarchy, racism [and] classism’ (p.15).

The authors inform us that ‘...according to functionalists the task of society is the creation of an homogenised whole and education contributes to the creation of this whole by teaching social roles, ensuring that school rules are applied and emphasising civic responsibilities’(p.15). Drudy and Lynch (1993) and Clancy (1995) argue that the functionalist perspective has been the dominant influence on educational policy in Ireland since the 1960s (p.18). They claim that a ‘major preoccupation of functionalists is with order – that is, how do societies remain cohesive and maintain themselves from one generation to another?’ (p.14). However, this research argues that ‘educational discourse is influenced by a range of values and ideologies, that can vary from one of the above perspectives to the other, or that can be located on a continuum between the two’ (p.29).

Chapter Three looks at the participation patterns of males and females in adult learning, the issues affecting their participation and the barriers they face. The authors found that participation in adult education strongly correlated with students' highest level of initial education, with male students focusing on vocational training whilst female students favour personal development.

At the core of this research is the methodology used by the authors to disseminate the material under review. Chapter Four describes the research methodology used for this purpose, which utilised both a quantitative and a qualitative approach. Questionnaires were administered based on the work of cognitive theorists Kolb (1985) and Allinson and Hayes (1996) to establish information on gendered learning styles. However, whilst these learning inventories can provide us with a useful framework to examine students preferred learning styles, the authors advise the need for caution in their application. It must be argued that we are all capable of learning through a variety of different intelligences no matter what our individual preference is.

Kolb's Learning Style Inventory (LSI) and Allinson & Hayes Cognitive Style Index (CSI) are dealt with in a clear and concise manner in Chapter Five. However, the authors note that '...due to their quantitative nature, both instruments offer very little insight as to the learners themselves' (p.60). Paradoxically, when used to measure the same group of people Kolb's LSI showed the 64% of learners were Dynamic, whereas Allinson & Hayes CSI found the same group of learners to be Analytic. Dynamic students '...perceive information concretely and process it actively...(they do not) ...respond well in traditional classroom settings. Their favourite question is, 'What if?' (p.55). Analytic students '...perceive information abstractly and process it actively. They are objective learners and personal involvement makes them uncomfortable...Their favourite question is 'What?' (p.55). Despite the contradictory nature of these results the authors believe that when they take '...each of the instruments separately the findings indicate that the similarities in the learning styles of the men and women participating in this study outweigh the differences' (p.66).

Chapter Six reiterates the results of the research instruments which indicate that there is no significant difference in the learning styles of the men and women in this study. However, the qualitative data examined in this section highlights a difference in the process of learning as experienced by men and women learners. 'For example, men experienced higher levels of frustration, and were less likely to per-

sist with learning if the outcomes were not immediately evident' (p.117), whilst women are more likely to work within a supported environment '...and to perceive adult education as a more holistic developmental experience' (p.118). This chapter concludes with one of the key findings from the research: 'Once adult learners became engaged in the learning process, their needs were strikingly similar, pivoting on a learner-centred approach by the tutors and providers' (p.118).

This research set out to interrogate the learning styles of women and men and their implications for further education and training. The findings garnered from the overall research highlight a number of areas that are worthy of attention. Firstly, it is clear from the findings that the use of a single theory approach does not do justice to the multiplicity of learning styles adopted by adult learners. Within traditional educational discourse a lot of emphasis is placed on looking at the role of cognitive theories in helping to disseminate how we as humans know the world. However, as the cognitive learning style inventories used yielded contradictory results, the authors urge the use of great caution in applying these measurements to adult learners. Notwithstanding this the findings from this study translate into a useful tool in the adult educator's kitbag. Used in conjunction with theories within other fields such as the behaviourist, feminist, humanist, liberatory and psychoanalytic schools of thought, it adds to our understanding of how the learning process can differ for men and women.

Secondly, I felt that the voices of the learners, the tutors and the service providers/agency representatives as delineated through the research highlighted the need for a more collaborative and flexible approach to the provision of adult education. Despite improvements in the area both learners and providers are still experiencing a number of barriers including access and funding. Suggestions offered include the need to develop curricula that encompasses the 'range of needs of adult learners including personal, educational and vocational development and that programmes be regularly evaluated by both learners and tutors' (p.123).

As a relative newcomer to the adult education arena, I enjoyed looking at the issues that this study highlighted. I liked having the work of the cognitive theorists Kolb (1984) and Allinson and Hayes (1996) made accessible. I also believe it is important that researchers continue to develop models that provide both a historical context and analytic framework for understanding the role of gender and learning. Having internalised the dominant hegemonic discourse that informs us

that women and men learn differently, I was eager to find out if this research would support this fact. This research found that the difference lies within the process rather than individual learning styles.

Finally, I think that the strength of this work lies in listening to the voices of the research participants and in recognising how gendered, social, economic and cultural cues impact on their roles as learners. The challenge for all of us involved in adult education is to continue to provide learners with the space to have their voices understood and acknowledged. This needs to be done within a learner-centred approach that acknowledges difference and accepts that all learners operate within a gendered continuum that cannot be neatly categorised into male/female or specific learning categories.

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Adults Learning

JENNY ROGERS

(Buckingham: (4th Edition) Open University Press, pp.215, €19.95)

This is a no-nonsense, down to earth and practical handbook for adult educators and trainers working in any setting. It is full of wisdom rooted in personal experience, nourished by the infectious enthusiasm of a teacher who is herself a lifelong learner. She communicates her insights with an open, accessible, direct and refreshing lightness of touch. It is evident that it is these very qualities which have contributed in no small way to its enduring appeal for over thirty years. First published in 1971, it has been reprinted eleven times and translated into several languages including Chinese and Japanese.

The author's credentials as an experienced adult educator and trainer are impressive. Her career portfolio includes work as a teacher of (young and older) adults, as an internal education consultant (for the BBC), as a T.V. producer, as commissioning editor for the Open College, as manager of a BBC training department and currently, as manager of her own company involved in training, teaching, consultancy and coaching work. She views her own career as a 'living case study' of the central importance of lifelong learning in peoples' lives. Throughout this book she draws on her wide experience of real life encounters with adult learners (including her own, colleagues and course participants) to animate, illuminate and illustrate many aspects of working with adult groups.

Just a couple of examples will suffice to show her approach. Explaining how much she has learned from her encounters with course participants, she describes how in her early career a significantly large group of 18 year olds were inexplicably late arriving to the class, leaving 'only the two class swots.... exchanging desultory conversation with me in an empty classroom'. Some ten minutes later the class cupboard burst open and out tumbled the other 15 group members who explained 'We know you like discussing things with Tom and Pauline, so we thought we'd play a little trick'. From this she learned rather painfully that 'like many teachers I was talking to the 'good' students far too much. They were telling me that they'd all like a share' (p.3).

Again from her own experience, this time as an adult learner attending a class on seventeenth century drama, she describes a tutor who frequently asserted his commitment to participatory learning, mutual cooperation in the learning process and 'that he expected to learn as much from the class as we did'. However, the reality confounded the rhetoric since, 'despite considerable wit and charm' his natural temperament led him to do most of the talking, answering at least half of his own questions because he couldn't handle potentially embarrassing silence and conducted searching discussions but only with the same 'three or four most naturally voluble and perhaps most able students' (p.66).

Such examples of real life encounters in adult learning constitute *Adults Learning's* greatest strength. They permeate the book and help humanise, contextualise and give a credible immediacy to the core values and principles of working effectively with adult learners. This is especially the case when she is considering the topics of the first eight chapters (of eleven in all) such as giving feedback, understanding adult learners and learning (including mixed ability) groups, the importance of the first session, discussion and facilitation, case-studies, role play and lectures/demonstrations and so on. In addition to her accessible writing style and an approach anchored in the personal experiences of teachers and learners alike, it is apparent that Rogers' enduring appeal is fundamentally based on the soundness of the core values and principles she advocates throughout. Despite the changed context since its first publication, as she says herself, 'the core principles of good practice seem much the same' as do 'the needs of adult learners'.

What might these be? For her 'Learners First is the only motto' for the effective teacher of adults. This is the overriding principle which informs the entire book. In theory and in practice this means putting the needs of the learners centre stage - not the needs of the tutor, the provider or the accrediting authority. It implies and demands a fundamental respect for the adult status of the learner. This in turn translates as partnering the learners in the process, offering a democratic and non-authoritarian style of leadership, attending to the varied preferred learning styles of participants and using inclusive and genuinely participatory methods. The application of these values and principles does of course remove the teacher from centre stage and presents a fundamental challenge to traditional, didactic teaching attitudes, methods and expectations for both teachers and adult learners alike. As such it challenges us all, teachers and learners to question the 'schooling' or 'banking' model of educa-

tion in and through which our own understanding, attitudes, expectations and practices of education have been shaped and which has institutionalised a teacher and/or subject centred approach to teaching.

So much for the positives in this book. Are there any negatives? A number of weaknesses are apparent - some arising from its narrow pragmatic and functional focus - others from its long 'shelf life'. The former are more substantive. Thus there is an unquestioning acceptance of the ideology of the market and its consumerist, individualistic assumptions which lurk just beneath the surface throughout and which serve to reduce adult education to the status of just another commodity in the marketplace. Such reductionism is made explicit in her comment 'the customer, not the subject, comes first and is always right and the customer is the learner' (p.4). This mindset is also revealed in her treatment of the importance of clear objectives in course planning (pp.86-91) in which she uncritically sets out to apply a business derived management by objectives model (however simplified) to the task of course/programme planning. We find no apparent awareness of the limitations of such an approach though they have been well articulated for some time now by Stephen Brookfield (1986), for example, in his much weightier *Understanding and Facilitating Adult Learning*.

This brings us to the other weakness mentioned. Despite the updating evident in the final chapters on Coaching/Mentoring and Tutoring Open Learners there remains a sense that the busy life of the author has not enabled her to find time for reading more recent literature on her chosen topics. A glance at her rather limited bibliographical references indicates a certain datedness in the literature - of some twenty seven references some fourteen cover publications from 1928-1989, while the rest cover the 1990s, with just one from 2000. While not academic in intent and focus it seems to this reader that some evidence of keeping 'up to speed' with more current and wider literature on adult learning would have dissipated a palpable sense of recycling old material for the market. That said however, this book within its own terms has much practical wisdom to share with adult educators and trainers, whether experienced or just starting out as beginners.

TONY DOWNES RIP
Adult Education Consultant

“Lifelong learning needs to be reclaimed from the functional, the instrumental, the economic and the one-dimensional to mean a right to learn all that it is possible to learn.”

“With regard to benchmarks and indicators, it is important for adult education stakeholders to recognise that they are ‘here to stay’ and that they will shape the quantity and quality of adult education from now until 2010.”

“This untidy reality of adult learning poses some challenges to policy makers.”

“When you are an actor in the middle of the local adult education drama it is difficult to maintain a clear view of how the service might be managed in a more rational and coherent way.”

“In addition to the discussions on ‘lifelong learning’ we need a serious and detailed national debate on who and how we will fund learning.”

“Adult education will not thrive in Ireland unless proper structures are put in place in educational institutions at both second and third level.”

“Conceptual clarity within adult education is a rather elusive phenomenon and confusions have led to many practical difficulties and deep divides, the danger is that we overlook those and continue to move forward.”

“What must not be forgotten is that the whole thing began with the basic education needs of learners. They have to remain centre stage otherwise we will have lost our way.”



Adult Education Organiser's Association