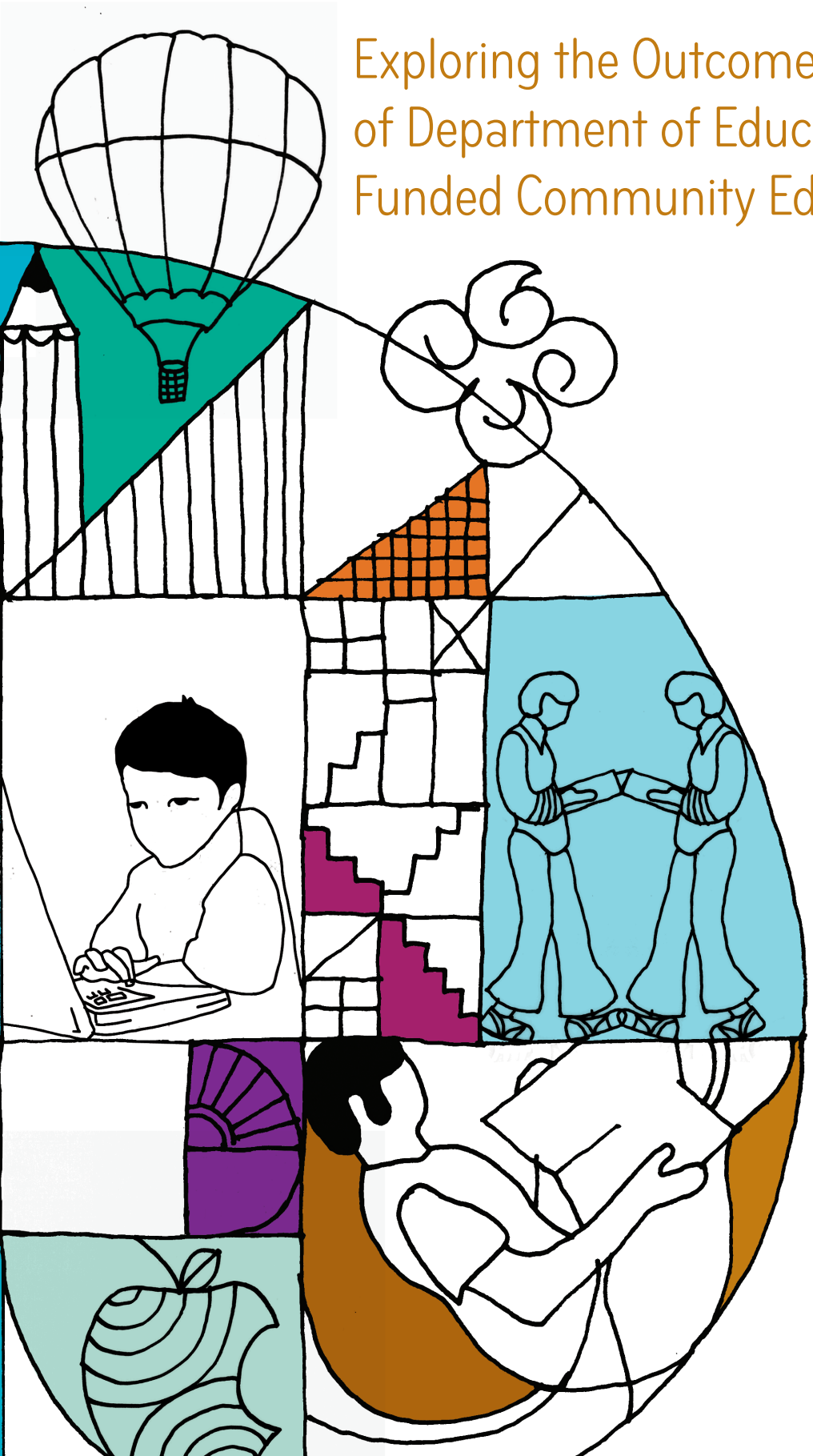
COMMUNITY EDUCATION: MORE THAN JUST A COURSE

Exploring the Outcomes and Impact of Department of Education and Skills Funded Community Education



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The Research Team for this project

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wishes to thank:

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The views in this report are entirely the views of the research team and do not necessarily reflect the views of AONTAS or the Department of Education and Skills.

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GLOSSARY

AEO	Adult Education Officer
ALCES	Adult Literacy and Community Education Scheme
BTEI	Back to Education Initiative
CEF	Community Education Facilitator
CSE	Civic and Social Engagement
DES	Department of Education and Skills
EEI	Education Equality Initiative
ESL	Early School Leaving
FETAC	Further Education and Training Awards Council
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
NQAI	National Qualifications Authority of Ireland
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
VEC	Vocational Education Committee

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2009 AONTAS commissioned a piece of research to examine the outcomes and impact of community education in relation to the three aims that the Government has defined for it: enhancing learning; fostering empowerment, and contributing to civic society. In part, the research also responds to a need to measure the wider benefits of learning (such as social, civic and health outcomes) in order to demonstrate how investment in education can decrease state spending in other policy areas, and can contribute to the functioning of democracy and achievement of equality. It also meets a requirement at national and European level to carry out research into adult learning that supports evidence-based policy-making.[1] It joins other nation-wide studies into the benefits of adult learning, such as those carried out in Finland and Denmark.[2]

The main research methods employed were a representative survey of 683 community education learners, eleven case studies of community education centres, surveys of personnel in the Vocational Education Committees (VECs) and interviews with key informants in community education. The survey was carried out with learners funded through the Adult Literacy and Community Education Scheme (ALCES) in the VECs. The case studies were a mix of providers funded through the Back to Education Initiative Community Strand and the ALCES budget.

The research demonstrated that community education has wide ranging positive outcomes for learners, effectively engages some of the groups living with inequality in Ireland, and is very positively experienced by learners. The specific findings of the study are set out below under the key questions that the research sought to answer.

WHO IS COMMUNITY EDUCATION FOR?

The research compared available guidelines about target groups for community education against the representative learner survey sample of ALCES learners as well as national data about the profile of ALCES and BTEI Community Strand learners. The key findings are:

1 EAEA. (2006). *Adult Education Trends and Issue in Europe.* EAEA: Belgium. and Department of Education and Science. (2008). *THE DEVELOPMENT AND STATE OF THE ART OF ADULT LEARNING AND EDUCATION (ALE): National Report.* Department of Education and Science: Ireland.

2 See Manninen, J. (2009). "Wider Benefits of Learning within Liberal Adult Education Systems" paper presented at the Third Nordic Conference for Adult Learning and Voss, M. (2007). "Provider of Social Competences and Motivation: report of Survey" Danish Adult Education Association: Denmark.

PETIT report website http://www.srep.ro:800/petit/

- DES funded community education is, for the most part, meeting an overall aim to provide opportunities to disadvantaged learners as 74% of ALCES learners belong to at least one of the priority target groups for this strand. Disadvantaged learners are also effectively targeted in the BTEI Community Strand.
- Some of the priority target groups for community education are well represented in ALCES community education. For instance 45% of people 16-64 left school at lower secondary or before, and 36% had a disability.
- However, the results validate that other target groups for ALCES community education such as lone parents, disadvantaged men, the homeless, younger people with disabilities, Travellers and ethnic minorities, and the unemployed are being less effectively targeted for community education as the proportion of learners in these categories is quite small.
- Programmes funded under the BTEI Community Strand have higher representation of the main priority target groups for both ALCES and BTEI community education including, disadvantaged men, the unemployed, and lone parents.
- Community education's stated role in engaging disadvantaged learners is borne out by the results of the research, but it seems there is still a tendency to recruit traditional target groups such as women and older people as opposed to more hard-to-reach groups.
- The results raise a question about the extent to which policy-makers and providers would like to see different target groups represented in community education.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY EDUCATION ABOUT?

The study examined key theoretical debates about the fundamental purpose of community education in accordance with four models and their accompanying pedagogies. It then presented which models are in evidence in DES funded community education. The main findings in relation to this question are:

- DES funded community education in Ireland is defined by the shared characteristics of all types of community education models. All types of community education involve local people engaging in informal, collaborative learning that they set the priorities for.
- The models of community education most strongly evidenced in the DES funded community education reflect that it is about bringing learning to people in their local areas as a response to the area's needs. It is less about, as described in an action model, learners engaging in local or social action to address structural disadvantage. However, qualitative data does emphasise that community education should engage disadvantaged learners. The latter characteristic is an element of action models of community education.

- The qualitative data shows that for the majority of case study providers, community education is part of a co-ordinated community development response to the needs of their local areas.
- However, there is some evidence of learners being engaged in learning for action as 51% of learners surveyed indicated their tutor had helped them to plan for and address problems in their local community.
- The qualitative data shows that learners are experiencing tutor relationships characterised by empathy, respect, encouragement and equality which in turn model those qualities for learners. They then enact those qualities in their relationships with others.
- Significant resources go into choosing community education tutors and the process of tutoring itself.

HOW IS DES COMMUNITY EDUCATION MANAGED AND SUPPORTED?

In order to answer this question the policy and operational context for DES funded community education were compared to data collected about funding allocation and management of provision. The key findings about this facet of the research are:

- There is a lack of a consistent approach to the management of community education across the VECs.
- In particular, there is variation in the criteria used to make decisions about resourcing groups. The main criteria employed were that the group identified the need for the course themselves or that they were comprised of members of one of the target groups named in the White Paper. Process-focused criteria (such as employing creative methods or fostering social action) or criteria about educational or income disadvantage were less likely to be used.
- The learner's survey sample shows community education does seem to be targeting disadvantaged individuals for the most part, and this feature would appear to be due to the CEFs knowledge of the communities they serve. Also the majority (81%) did use at least one criterion related to priority target group or educational/ income disadvantage to make decisions about groups to fund.
- However, the continuing over-recruitment of traditional disadvantaged target groups as opposed to more hard-to-reach groups asks us to consider if the lack of a standard approach to management of ALCES community education is an obstacle to the recruitment of the harder-to-reach groups in community education.

- The unique process of community education could be tracked and implemented with a clear policy about community education incorporating a standard approach to its management, clear funding criteria and effective tools to track outcomes. These outcomes measurement tools would need to be simple and easy to use for community education groups on the ground.
- ALCES funded community education learners do not stay in community education for long as the majority had completed less than two courses. This finding could confirm that community education is meeting a stated aim to bridge learners into other types of education and training.
- Word of mouth is the main way ALCES learners find out about community education courses. This strategy may not be the most effective means to engage hard to reach groups.

HOW DOES COMMUNITY EDUCATION FACILITATE ACCESS, PERSISTENCE AND RETENTION?

The research sought to understand to what extent community education uses documented strategies to encourage learners to persist with their learning. The main findings in relation to this question are:

- Community education providers facilitate a way into the learning setting by removing institutional barriers to access through flexible course provision and a welcoming environment.
- The main reasons learners become involved in community education are for social interaction, to become more involved in their communities and to raise their self-confidence. In particular, this finding is linked in the data to community education's unique role in addressing social isolation.
- It is particularly important for rural people to link into community education as a way to become more involved in the community.
- It is still particularly important for women to engage in community education for social interaction, which addresses their isolation in the home.
- Providers encourage learners' persistence by dedicating significant resources to ensuring that their interactions with learners: are positive, frequent and helpful; their spaces are welcoming and inviting, and they ensure an experience of dignity and respect for the learner. Likewise, learners deem these supports to be important.

- For those who have lower educational levels and for women it is still important that providers encourage access with a warm, friendly, welcome into the learning environment.
- DES funded community education is effective at offering supports that encourage the persistence of learners, many of whom are disadvantaged.

WHAT ARE THE CIVIC AND SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT OUTCOMES OF COMMUNITY EDUCATION?

The documented civic and social engagement (CSE) outcomes for learning were tracked in the research sample to investigate the extent to which they occur as a result of DES funded community education. The main findings in relation to CSE outcomes are:

- Community education is effective at creating outcomes which foster strong social networks and interpersonal trust and tolerance. The majority of learners experienced positive change in regard to talking to new people (89%), trying out new activities (88%), more contact with friends (69%), accepting beliefs that are different to my own (64%), visiting new places (61%) and more accepting and understanding of other cultures (60%).
- It is less effective at fostering civic and political outcomes as the main outcomes in this area were only experienced by a third or less of learners. This finding is at odds with the stated emphasis in the White Paper on learners taking action to address structural disadvantage. Community education is partially meeting the Departmental aim for ALCES community education to contribute to civic life.
- However, community education did cause many learners to be more likely to intervene in situations in their community that threaten community cohesion like anti-social behaviour. Therefore, in this respect, it does meet the Departmental aim for ALCES community education to enhance communities.
- If there is a desire to experience higher frequencies of civic and political outcomes in community education then civic engagement issues would need to be integrated into learning opportunities. A tentative conclusion is that practices in a social action model of community education are more effective at achieving CSE outcomes.
- The openness of the learning environment in community education is key to the achievement of CSE outcomes.

WHAT ARE THE HEALTH OUTCOMES OF COMMUNITY EDUCATION?

The extent to which learners said they experienced health related outcomes as a result of their community education experience was also documented as part of the research. Health outcomes include personal development and physical health behaviours. The key findings in answer to this question are:

- Personal development outcomes are very high for community education, showing that providers and groups are achieving a central goal for it, which is to enhance the self-esteem and confidence of learners (experienced by 85% of learners). These goals are particularly important for educationally disadvantaged learners who need to improve their self-belief as a foundation for academic efficacy.
- Community education does not cause learners to experience negative changes in relation to their personal development. This finding shows how community education reproduces the conditions for equality in education as learners instead experience a sense of self worth and value regardless of their background.
- Tutors and peers create the conditions for positive personal development by recognising learners' positive skills and qualities. This recognition develops self-confidence, which fosters persistence and the ability to engage in participatory democracy.
- Community education is meeting a need for generic skills development for disadvantaged learners, which is a goal for policy-makers and providers.
- Health outcomes for community education are limited, but do happen. In particular, learners said that they began to eat more healthily (46%) and exercise more (41%).
- Because VEC personnel and case study providers saw health outcomes as important for community education the results ask us to consider to what extent we would like to see health outcomes happen as a result of community education.

WHAT ARE THE PROGRESSION OUTCOMES OF COMMUNITY EDUCATION?

As any education holds the potential to encourage progression to further education, training or employment, the research sought to ascertain the extent to which community education learners experienced progression outcomes and how they defined progression. The main findings about this aspect of the research are:

- The primary progression goals for community education learners are learning a new skill (70%) or doing a non-certified course with this group or centre (55%).
- However, for half the sample attaining accreditation through their group was important.
- Accreditation is more important to learners than providers and VEC personnel reported in the research. Almost half (48%) felt they should receive accreditation every time they did a community education course. This desire could be linked to learners perceiving community education as functional adult education in their communities rather than education for collective development. It may also be linked to the desire for those with low educational qualifications to accrue educational advantage regardless of the type of learning engaged in.
- The research points strongly to the need for learners engaged in ALCES funded community education to have the option of gaining certification.
- Learners employ multiple concepts of progression to define their journey in community education as opposed to just one although the results were slightly more in favour for the concept of progression that is about maintenance of well-being (40%).
- This concept of progression is important in community education. Providers perceived attaining equilibrium as an essential precursor to other types of progression.

HOW DOES COMMUNITY EDUCATION CONTRIBUTE TO A FAIR, JUST AND MORE PROSPEROUS IRELAND?

Data from the study was analysed using an equality framework to assess the national contribution of community education to equality. Limited cost-benefit analyses of community education were carried out for a small number of learners to assess its economic benefit. The role of research in documenting community education's contribution was also explored. The main findings in answer to this question are:

- Community education has the potential to make a significant impact towards equality at a national level by engaging many disadvantaged learners in educational opportunities.
- It works towards equality by fostering outcomes that help individuals to form relationships of love, care and solidarity such as making new friends, and becoming more likely to intervene in situations that threaten community cohesion like anti-social behaviour. It also strengthens family cohesion.
- It also works towards equality by fostering outcomes that create relationships of respect and recognition between citizens such as increasing levels of trust and tolerance.

- These outcomes show that community education can help VECs promote equality, which is a legislative requirement for them.
- Community education represents value for money for DES as even with conservative estimates, learners who start to volunteer as a result of community education provide a high return of €28.8 million to the State and a low return of €9.1 million per annum.
- The role of research in the provision of community education could be strengthened. In order to enhance this role a cultural shift needs to happen from the Departmental level to VECs, to providers and practitioners. This cultural shift would involve the valuing of evidence-based practice and decision-making. Improved data collection could help DES and the VECs carry out equality impact assessments of provision.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following conclusions and recommendations were proposed.

The Need for a Vision

This research has identified the need for key stakeholders to work towards a vision and clear policy for community education, with agreement on key elements of a model, and incorporating BTEI and ALCES funded community education. Following from that guidelines for funding can be developed or amended, including agreement on priority groups and targets for their representation, outcomes to be achieved, principles to inform the work and criteria for funding that would help to attain the targets.

The recommendations arising from this conclusion are:

- Create a clear vision for community education including a consistent approach, funding guidelines, principles, outcomes to be achieved, priority groups and targets.
- If an integrated adult education service approach is to be implemented, consider if the unique role and process of community education can be maintained in it, or if community education should be wholly funded and administered through its own budget line at national level as was originally envisioned in the White Paper.

Community Education Implements a Community Organisation/ Development Model

The main model implemented in DES funded community education is a hybrid approach of a community organization and a community development model. In other words education is brought to local areas in response to the community's identified needs as programmes that combat social isolation and foster personal development, but does not usually extend to action for social change. However, learners experience the tutor approaches in evidence very positively.

Stakeholders of DES funded community education could usefully consider whether they are satisfied that the community organization/ development model is the best practice model to implement.

Recommendations arising from this conclusion are:

- Consider if this hybrid model is the most effective one to implement in Ireland or if another model would be more appropriate for achieving the characteristics and outcomes of community education that stakeholders agree are important.
- Develop a model for the continuous professional development of tutors/ facilitators that fosters the skills and qualities charted in the research.
- Make the skills and qualities emphasised in the research a requirement for the recruitment of community education tutors/ facilitators.

The Importance of a Locally Integrated Response

The research presented case studies of strongly managed centres with links to their local civil societies. They appeared to achieve higher rates of the outcomes measured in the research, particularly the civic engagement outcomes. These centres included education as part of a range of community development actions.

Recommendations arising from this conclusion are:

- Include as a funding criteria for all community education groups that they must demonstrate an integrated local approach for the delivery of educational opportunities or must be committed to developing an approach as part of their provision.
- Ensure that all community education services can assist groups to develop integrated approaches.

- Use the case studies as a model to develop a guide for providers that can assist them to develop an integrated approach.

Community Education Enhances Learning

The research has shown that DES funded community education realizes this aim at the individual level. It is less effective at fostering learning for collective development.

The recommendations arising from this conclusion are:

- Continue to emphasise the practices that encourage persistence in community education.
- Offer the option of accreditation to community education learners, but do not make it a requirement.
- Track the type of progression that community education learners are interested in.
- Demonstrate how FETAC modules and awards fit into the National Framework of Qualifications and how learners can progress through the framework.
- Promote to learners and providers the dual value of community education for individual development and collective development for action. For instance, through case studies of other groups who have focused on both in their learning.
- Ensure that tutors understand the concept of collective development for action and can employ pedagogy that will facilitate it.

Community Education Results in Empowerment

The research showed that community education is meeting this aim for community education and is very effective at doing so by fostering skills for personal development. Community education produces community empowerment by achieving outcomes that help to build strong social networks, trust and tolerance between community members and safer communities. It has a limited impact on empowering learners to make physical health related changes.

The recommendations arising from this conclusion are:

- Promote the continuing value of community education for individual empowerment, personal development and community empowerment.
- Discuss and agree to what extent community education should achieve physical health related outcomes.

- Promote the value of providers engaging in practices that can achieve physical health related outcomes such as having health-related information on site, linking with local health providers or local sports partnerships, and incorporating health learning into programmes.

Community Education makes a Limited Contribution to Civic Society

Community education is not as effective at achieving outcomes related to its third aim of civic engagement, illustrated by relatively low rates of learners experiencing these outcomes, although in its empowerment outcomes it does prepare learners for this type of activity. An action model of community education could be effective at achieving these outcomes for community education.

The recommendations arising from this conclusion are:

- Promote the value of an action model for community education in achieving civic engagement outcomes.
- Agree the extent to which these types of outcomes should occur through community education.
- Ensure that tutors/facilitators are able to integrate civic learning into programmes.
- Ensure that providers can engage in practices that help to achieve civic engagement outcomes such as links to volunteer opportunities or consideration of local social inclusion issues in courses.
- Employ or promote the Women's Community Education Quality Assurance Framework as a practical guide to the implementation of an action model of community education that can enhance the achievement of civic engagement outcomes.

The Openness of the Learning Environment is Essential

Community education fosters social and human capital by ensuring that the group becomes the primary resource for learning. An open learning environment creates this condition involving a great deal of discussion, experiential learning, encouraging and the modeling of empathy and respect.

The recommendation arising from this conclusion is:

- Ensure that organisational policies and procedures articulate standards that make essential the conditions necessary to create a collaborative, open learning environment for community education programmes.

Community Education makes a Contribution to Equality

The research has shown that the contribution of community education to Ireland is substantial. Its contribution could be strengthened if its part in developing civic society was enhanced, as more groups might take action to address inequality.

The recommendations arising from this conclusion are:

- Promote the importance of the development of self-confidence in community education as a form of recognition that can help to achieve equality for learners.
- Use the results of this research to argue for the adequate resourcing of community education.
- Highlight how community education helps VECs and DES to promote equality and chart the impact of their work in this regard.
- Strive to achieve higher rates of civic engagement outcomes for community education.

Community Education Represents Value for Money and can Contribute to Prosperity

Community education has the potential to make a significant financial return to the State in terms of the creation of volunteers in communities throughout Ireland. At the very least, it almost pays for itself in this regard. It can also help some individuals to increase their incomes. While it could not be monetarily valued it may also have this potential in terms of diminished health related spending.

The recommendations arising from this conclusion are:

- As above, use the results of this research to argue for sustainable funding for community education.
- Promote the role that community education can play in achieving the National Skills Strategy as well as the development of participatory democracy.
- Highlight the impact of community education on volunteering in Ireland to key stakeholders such as the Taskforce on Active Citizenship.

The BTEI Community Strand is Potentially a Model for Best Practice

A tentative conclusion is that community education funded under this strand is potentially a model of best practice for the formulation of guidelines for ALCES funded community education. It would seem that the clear guidelines for BTEI community education result in provision that may be more effective at achieving outcomes and targeting priority groups for community education. However, this conclusion would need to be validated with further research.

The recommendations arising from this conclusion are:

- Use the BTEI Guidelines as a template to develop clear guidelines for ALCES funded community education.
- Share case studies of BTEI groups with other providers, VECs and practitioners.
- Administer the learner's survey to a representative sample of learners in this strand to compare to the findings of the survey presented in this research.
- Promote and share published BTEI guidelines, such as those about involving men, and outreach, to other DES community education stakeholders.

There is a Need for more Evidence

The research found that there needs to be more evidence about DES funded community education and other types of community education provision. Evidence needs to be tracked continuously and in a consistent way.

The recommendations arising from this conclusion are:

- Ensure that all funding granted for community education ring-fences resources to evaluate programmes.
- Integrate the importance of evidence-based practice into CPD for community educators and third level programmes relevant to the practice of adult and community education.
- Provide training for providers about evidence-based practice and tracking outcomes.
- Endeavour to commence annual nationally standardized tracking of the wider benefits of learning through the indicators, which emerged from this study as well as any others that stakeholders agree are important. Use the learner's survey questionnaire as a template for this exercise. The tool could initially be piloted in one or two VEC areas or administered only to a representative cohort of learners.

- Carry out comparative research to assess the outcomes of other types of adult learning in Ireland, as well as community education not solely funded through the Department of Education and Skills. If appropriate, use a similar methodology and tools to this study so that the data is comparable.

The Research has Established Tentative Indicators for Community Education

The most notable outcomes tracked through the research are recommended for longitudinal tracking to see if they could be valid indicators for community education.

The recommendations arising from this conclusion are:

- Discuss and agree any other outcomes to be tracked surplus to the list above as part of a national tracking exercise.
- Review the efficacy of these indicators on an annual basis.
- Use this research to engage in international work towards the development of internationally comparable indicators.

There needs to be more Effective Targeting of all the Priority Target Groups for Community Education

The majority of learners participating in community education are disadvantaged, but not all stated priority target groups are well represented.

The recommendations arising from this conclusion are:

- Continue to proactively work with groups and providers who work with the harder-to-reach target groups for community education.
- Create targets for the representation of priority target groups in the overall cohort of learners in both BTEI and ALCES community education.
- Provide training on outreach for providers and for third level programmes about adult and community education.
- Ring fence funding for outreach in community education programmes and community education services. Particularly, for those groups that are harder-to-reach as this work requires extra resources.
- Ensure there are places reserved in community education for learners who do not fit into the priority target groups.

2 INTRODUCTION

It has been ten years since the Government published 'Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education'[3] in which it acknowledged the unique contribution of community education to adult learning in Ireland.

In the White Paper the role of community education was described in terms of the ways providers had successfully engaged large numbers of learners from disadvantaged communities in community-based learning. This learning was portrayed as pioneering, innovative and experiential employing creative methods. The adopted view of community education was of non-formal, process-focused learning that took place in non-hierarchical settings, and offered opportunities for individual development and social analysis. It also created the potential for the learner group to engage in local or social change to address structural barriers.

In 2009, AONTAS commissioned research, which aimed to understand the national impact of Department of Education and Skills funded community education. In particular, AONTAS sought to gain a clear sense of the outcomes of community education as voiced by learners themselves. AONTAS has always had a strong commitment to community education. The organization has written and commissioned a number of research and policy publications about it. It has also coordinated a number of capacity building initiatives for the community education sector.[4] The organisation is concerned with promoting the sector's sustainability and contributing to debate about appropriate investment in community education.

The research on community education presented in this report answers the call from both national and international quarters to measure economic and social progress by evaluating the outcomes of state funded programmes.[5] In particular, it meets a need to measure the wider benefits of learning (such as social, civic and health outcomes) in order to demonstrate how investment in education can: decrease state spending in other policy areas; contribute to the functioning of democracy and achievement of equality, and foster the well-being of adults.[6] It also satisfies a requirement at national and European level

3 Government of Ireland. (2000). *Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education.* Government Stationary Office: Dublin.

4 These initiatives include the Community Education Network (CEN), the Women's Community Education Quality Assurance Mainstreaming Project and the Community Education Facilitator (CEF) National Training Programme.

5 National Economic and Social Council (NESC). (2009). *Well-being Matters: a Social Report for Ireland.* NESC: Dublin.

6 For instance, see NIACE. (2010). *Lifelong Learning: contributing to Well-being and Prosperity.* Spending Review 2010. NIACE: UK.

to carry out research into adult learning that supports evidence-based policy-making.[7] It joins other nation-wide studies into the benefits of adult learning, such as those carried out in Finland, Denmark and the United Kingdom.[8]

There has been to-date, no national, mixed method research[9] examining the outcomes of any type of adult learning in Ireland despite a call from the OECD for research, which demonstrates the link between different types of learning and their outcomes.[10] Ten years on from the White Paper, in a vastly changed landscape, it is timely to take stock of community education and contribute to its evidence base.

This research is intended to be of use to policy-makers, practitioners, education managers and learners alike.

Aim and Objectives

The overall aim of the research was:

To determine the individual, collective and societal outcomes of Department of Education and Skills (DES) funded community education and its potential to contribute to a fairer, just and more prosperous Republic of Ireland.

The objectives of the research were to:

- Present an up-to-date review of the major policy trends and philosophical debates about community education and the possible social, economic, and cultural outcomes it can have.

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7 EAEA. (2006). *Adult Education Trends and Issue in Europe.* EAEA: Belgium. Also see Department of Education and Science. (2008). *THE DEVELOPMENT AND STATE OF THE ART OF ADULT LEARNING AND EDUCATION (ALE): National Report.* Department of Education and Science: Ireland.

8 See Manninen, J. (2009). "Wider Benefits of Learning within Liberal Adult Education Systems" paper presented at the Third Nordic Conference for Adult Learning and Voss, M. (2007). "Provider of Social Competences and Motivation: report of Survey" Danish Adult Education Association: Denmark.

PETIT report website http://www.srep.ro:800/petit/ Also see Feinstein et al. (2003). *Contribution of Adult Learning to Health and Social Capital.* Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning: UK.

9 Mixed method research employs both quantitative and qualitative methods concurrently to explore a phenomenon. This type of research allows for methodological triangulation supporting the rigour of the research and also allows for a 'more complete and dynamic picture' of the research topic. See Sarantakos, S. (2005). *Social Research, 3rd edition.* Palgrave Macmillan: UK. 49.

10 OECD. (2007). *Understanding the Social Outcomes of Learning.* OECD: France. A survey was recently carried out by Maunsell, C., Carrigan, J. Downes, P., McLoughlin, V. & Byrne, I. (2009). *National Report of a Survey of 1000 Adult Learners' Experiences of Returning to Education.* LLL2010 Towards a Lifelong Learning Society: The Contribution of the Education System (publication forthcoming), but this did not assess learner outcomes per se.

- Scope the operational environment for DES funded community education and profile research participants in relation to that environment.
- Classify providers' and support personnel's philosophical orientations to DES funded community education and both the hoped for and achieved outcomes linked to each orientation.
- Document the social, economic and technical barriers DES funded community education providers and those who support them face.
- Identify the progression routes and other outcomes both desired and achieved by DES funded community education learners and the barriers they face to reaching them, including their views on the NFQ and gaining accreditation through community education.
- Conduct cost/ benefit analyses of undertaking DES funded community education for a small group of community education learners, incorporating social and economic benefits to the learner.
- Contribute to the development of indicators to measure the impact of community education.
- Use the findings to ascertain if the potential contributions of community education to a fairer, just and more prosperous Ireland are valid for DES funded community education and make recommendations for technical, financial and strategic supports that can ensure this continued contribution.

Methodology

A detailed study methodology is available as a separate report.[11] The following methods were employed to achieve the research objectives:

- A representative survey of 683 community education learners engaged in programmes funded through the Adult Literacy and Community Education Scheme (ALCES) from DES, sampled through 31 of the VECs.[12] Where appropriate, resulting data was analysed for trends relating to age, education levels, gender and rural/urban habitation. Results are given as a percentage of the total sample that answered the question excluding those that gave no answer. If low numbers of learners answered a question this will be mentioned in the text.
- A purposively sampled survey of 61 relevant personnel working in the Vocational Education Committees (VECs) across the country eliciting their understanding of community education. Respondents were, for the most part, Community Education Facilitators and Adult Education Officers.
- A survey of 31 Community Education Facilitators (CEFs) asking about the provision of community education in their local areas.
- Eleven purposive in-depth case studies of community education providers incorporating past and present learner case studies each one representing one of the target groups for community education named in the White Paper. Also purposively sampled were providers who met one of the following criteria: urban, rural, small centre, large centre, anti-poverty and family resource centre. Six of the case study organisations were funded through the Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) Community Strand.
- Nine semi-structured interviews with key community education informants sampled purposively.

The profile of survey respondents is available in Chapter Three. Detailed information about the samples for the VEC Survey, the CEF questionnaire, case studies and interviews is available in Appendix A. The learner's survey results are representative of community education that is resourced through ALCES and provided through the VECs. The case studies offer some insight into community education funded through the BTEI

11 see Bailey, N. (2010). *Methodology for Exploring the Impact and Outcomes of DES funded Community Education.* AONTAS: Dublin.

12 City of Dublin VEC declined to participate. County Meath did not initiate the research within the data collection timeframe.

Community Strand. Results from both samples are combined to express findings about DES funded community education.

Limitations of the Study

The main limitation of the research was that no comparative research has been conducted on other types of adult learning. Therefore, it is impossible to say if community education achieves outcomes that other types of learning do not achieve. The other limitations were:

- The research was only carried out with DES funded community education programmes. It is important to note that a significant proportion of community education is carried out by other providers funded through other sources, and this research cannot offer any insight into the outcomes and impact of that provision.
- The exclusion of community education programmes funded through the Back to Education Initiative Formal Strand from the research. This choice was made because it proved too difficult to isolate community education programmes from those that were not, since a variety of educational opportunities for adults are funded through this strand.
- The survey carried out with VEC personnel was not representative so cannot make claims to stand for all relevant personnel.
- The six case studies funded through the BTEI Community Strand may not be representative of all the community education resourced through this programme. Therefore, conclusions about community education related to this strand are tentative.
- The strategic interviews do not include the CEO of a VEC. Four CEOs were invited to interview. One declined to participate, another agreed and cancelled at the last moment and two did not respond to the invitation. It was not possible during the timescale of the research to approach any others. Therefore, CEO views are not represented in the research.

Format of this Report

This report is intended for a variety of audiences and different chapters may appeal to different audiences. Each chapter contains its own summary of main findings, review of relevant literature, data analysis and discussion. The table below gives a summary of each chapter.

Table 2.1 Breakdown of Research Report

Chapter	Summary
Chapter 3: Who is Community Education for?	Explores the State designation of target groups for community education and their needs. Presents the learner's survey sample profile to explore to what extent the target groups are being effectively recruited to community education or are experiencing disadvantage.
Chapter 4: What is Community Education about?	Presents the key theoretical models for community education and tutor-learner relationships and compares research findings against them to see which models are evident in DES funded community education.
Chapter 5: How is DES Community Education Managed and Supported?	Presents the policy guidelines for community education and compares management of community education against that policy, particularly in terms of criteria for resourcing groups.
Chapter 6: How does Community Education facilitate Access Persistence and Retention?	Explores the documented motivations, barriers and supports for adult and community education and sees if the research result bears out those findings.
Chapter 7: What are the Civic and Social Engagement (CSE) Outcomes of Community Education?	Presents to what extent DES funded community education achieves CSE outcomes documented in relation to other types of learning.
Chapter 8: What are the Health Outcomes of Community Education?	Presents to what extent DES funded community education achieves health related outcomes documented in relation to other types of learning, including those related to personal development.
Chapter 9: What are the Progression Outcomes of Community Education?	Presents to what extent DES funded community education achieves progression outcomes documented in relation to other types of learning.
Chapter 10: What is the Contribution of Community Education to a Fairer, Just and more Prosperous Ireland?	Uses an equality framework to assess how community education is making a national impact in relation to fairness and equality. Presents the monetary contribution of community education to the State.
Chapter 11: Conclusions and Recommendations	Presents key conclusions from the research and makes recommendations to stakeholders.

Setting the Scene

Since relevant literature is integrated into its appropriate chapter a brief overarching introduction to the context of the study will be given here.

Department of Education and Skills Adult Learning Provision

DES funded community education is one of a range of educational services for adults financed by the Department as part of a commitment to lifelong learning. This commitment is a belief in the necessity of learning throughout the life course that develops knowledge, skills and competences for personal development, social and civic engagement and employment.[13]

The majority of DES financed adult learning programmes are part-time and delivered through the adult education services of the 33 Vocational Education Committees across the country. Table 2.2 summarises these programmes.

Table 2.2 Adult Learning Programmes funded by DES[14]

Programme/Course	Personnel
Adult Literacy Service	Adult Literacy Organisers
Vocational Training Opportunities Schemes (VTOS) in core VTOS centres and Further Education Colleges	VTOS Co-ordinators
Senior Traveller Training programmes in Senior Traveller Training Centres	Senior Traveller Training Centre Directors
Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) courses run by community groups and adult/community education centres (Formal strand and Community strand)	BTEI Co-ordinators
Education Services to Prisons	Supervising Teachers, Prison Education Service Organisers
Community education courses	Community Education Facilitators (CEFs)
Self-financing day-time and evening courses	Directors of Adult Education and Adult Education Officers (AEOs)
Adult Education Guidance Service	Adult Education Guidance Officers

13 Government of Ireland. (2002). *Report of the Taskforce on Lifelong Learning.* Government Stationary Office: Dublin.

14 Reprinted from Bailey, N. (2009). *Integrating Development Education into Adult Education using Active Citizenship as a Focus.* AONTAS: Dublin.

These programmes are influenced by the overarching goals of the Department of Education and Skills for adult learning, which are to:

- Meet the needs of early school leavers,
- Provide second chance education for people who did not complete upper secondary, and
- Provide vocational preparation and training for labour market entrants and re-entrants[15].

The first two of these goals are primarily concerned with combating educational disadvantage. These two goals are addressed through a variety of services including community education, adult literacy, and the Adult Education Guidance Initiative. Guidance services in VECs provide education guidance to the returning adult learner and their objectives include offering services to community education learners.[16] Adult literacy services in the VECs offer basic skills education to over 50,000 adults nationally.[17]

Community Education

In the main, DES funds community education through the two programmes set out in the table below.

Table 2.3 DES Funded Community Education

Funding Programme	Learning Programme/ Course	VEC Personnel	No. of Programmes
Adult Literacy and Community Education Scheme (ALCES) allocated by DES to VECs	Community education courses funded by either tutor hours, small grants or a mixture of both to small community groups	Community Education Facilitators (CEFs) (although they may not directly manage the budget)	Total number not available
BTEI Community Strand allocated directly from DES to community groups	BTEI courses free for those with less than upper secondary education	At national level – Further Education Co-ordinator At local VEC level – CEF supports Community Strand	45 in 2009

15 Ibid.

16 Eustace, A. and S. Phillips. (2010). *Overarching Research on the Adult Education Guidance Initiative 2000-2006.* National Centre for Guidance in Education. Ireland.

17 See www.nala.ie

These programmes are part-time. The overarching description of ALCES funded community education is contained in a funding letter for the ALCES budget from the then Department of Education and Science in 2005. This letter said:

> *The Department of Education and Science funds community education that is outside the formal education sector, with the aims of enhancing learning, empowerment and contributing to civic society. This provision is community based with local groups taking responsibility for and playing a key role in, organising courses, deciding on programme content and recruiting tutors. The grants provided by the Department are to enable disadvantaged adults to avail of community education at minimal or no cost, normally allocated through the provision of teaching hours or small grants. The budget provided by the Department also includes provision for Community Education Facilitators.*[18]

More detailed guidelines about the process, management and provision of community education funded through the ALCES budget are contained in the White Paper, and in the role description for CEFs (see Appendix B). These are considered in more detail in relevant chapters throughout the report. Adherence to the specific guidelines in the White Paper is at the discretion and interpretation of individual VEC management and the CEF in each area. ALCES community education learners are eligible for and would be encouraged to progress to other further education options such as Adult Literacy and Community Education through the ALCES budget, Youthreach and Traveller Programmes, Vocational Training and Opportunities Scheme and Post Leaving Certificate Courses.

The Back to Education Initiative was established to complement the further education programmes mentioned above and designed to increase the participation of young people and adults with less than upper secondary education. The aim is to facilitate adults' access, transfer and progression to other education or employment pathways. It has strict criteria, guidelines and priority target groups. It funds groups operating according to the following principles: learner-centredness; equality; accessibility and inclusiveness; recognizing and accommodating diversity, quality assurance, local consultation and area-based approach, and innovation.[19]

18 Department of Education and Skills. (2005). "Funding Letter for ALCES Budget, 2005."

19 Department of Education and Skills. (2010). *Guidelines for BTEI Community Strand Funding*. DES: Ireland.

The Back to Education Initiative has two strands: formal and community. The formal strand funding is distributed mainly to VECs and may or may not include programmes in community settings. Thus, it was excluded from this piece of research. The BTEI Community Strand comprises 10% of all places approved for the Back to Education Initiative and is specifically for programmes provided in community groups and settings.

The bulk of learning in community education funded through the ALCES budget is non-accredited and if it is, is usually certified at Levels 3 or 4 of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). BTEI Community Strand courses should lead to certification, preferably at Level four or below, although this is not compulsory for participants.

Educational Disadvantage

One role for community education is to address educational disadvantage. According to the Combat Poverty Agency educational disadvantage "refers to a situation whereby individuals in their society derive less benefit from the education system than their peers."[20] This situation is discernible in Ireland through early school leaving, rates of participation in higher education and literacy rates. Educational disadvantage is both a cause and effect of social and economic exclusion. Those individuals who are educationally disadvantaged are more likely to be living in poverty and in the lower socio-economic groups.

The following statistics illustrate the prevalence of educational disadvantage in Ireland:

- According to the 1997 Adult Literacy Survey 25% of people in Ireland aged 15-64 were situated in the lowest level of attainment for literacy (level 1). A further 32% were placed at level 2.[21]
- Census 2006 found that 1.08 million people completed their education at lower secondary or less with 514, 085 of those having primary or no formal schooling.[22]
- A recent report about early school leaving (ESL) in Ireland found that 9000 people leave school before the Leaving Certificate every year and this figure has remained steady since the mid-1990s.[23]

20 Combat Poverty Agency. (2003). *Poverty Briefing 14: Educational Disadvantage in Ireland.* CPA: Ireland.

21 Government of Ireland. (1997). *International Adult Literacy Survey – Report for Ireland.* Government Stationary Office: Dublin.

22 www.cso.ie

23 Byrne, D and E. Smyth. (2009). *No Way Back – the Dynamics of Early School Leaving.* ESRI: Dublin.

More detailed presentation of the dynamics of educational disadvantage are presented in Chapter Three of this report.

Relevant Policy

The primary written commitment to and guidance for DES funded community education, and for all adult learning provision, remains the 2000 White Paper in which the Government indicated that it wished to see the community education sector strengthened and acknowledged it as a driving force in engaging the most marginalised in education. The specific guidelines set out in the White Paper will be explored at relevant moments throughout the report.

The White Paper was the Government's first expression of a commitment to lifelong learning. Subsequently, the Taskforce on Lifelong Learning made strategic recommendations for a framework for a lifelong learning society in Ireland. The Task Force described the vision for lifelong learning as "the State and citizens working in partnership should achieve: the skills, motivation, inputs/tolls, resources and time to engage in learning on a lifelong basis and thus enrich lives and develop a more prosperous, inclusive society."[24]

Both the social partnership agreement and the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion (NAPSIncl) reiterate a commitment to combating educational disadvantage through lifelong learning.[25] These assurances are applicable to community education. In particular, *Towards 2016* makes a commitment to increasing the participation of low skilled and low paid people of working age in lifelong learning.

A major policy development since the White Paper has been the development of the National Framework of Qualifications and subsequent increase in availability of accredited awards on a modularized basis.

24 Government of Ireland. (2002). *Report of the Taskforce on Lifelong Learning.* Government Stationary Office: Dublin. 7.

25 Government of Ireland. (2007). *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion, 2007-2016.* Government Stationary Office: Dublin.

The *National Skills Strategy*[26], the Government's commitment to upskilling the workforce, has targets to reach by 2020 including moving 70,000 people from Levels 1 and 2 on the NFQ to Level three and ensuring 260,000 up to levels 4 or 5.[27] It also highlights the need for enhancing generic skills in the population including literacy and numeracy, people skills and conceptual skills.

Since much of the provision in community education is geared towards people who would be at Levels one or two of the framework, or may be offering learning that could be placed at Level three on the National Framework of Qualifications, community education is well-placed to deliver on some of the targets in the Strategy. Also, much of the learning that takes place in community education settings could facilitate the generic skills development named in the strategy. Therefore, community education provision may be subject to the goals of this strategy.

Community education may also be subject to an exploration, on the part of DES, of an integrated adult education service, for which there are no separate budget lines.[28] Under this type of a service, VECs would allocate funding to different types of provision based on learner needs.

Community education's role in collective development and facilitating social and civic engagement is governed by the White Paper's commitment to adult learning, which emphasises citizenship education, consciousness-raising, cultural development, cohesion and community-building. More recently, the Taskforce on Active Citizenship recommended the integration of active citizenship modules into adult and community education.[29] *Towards 2016* also contained a goal about encouraging older people's access to social and civic life, which community education is a part of in local communities around Ireland.

26 Expert Working Group on Future's Skills Needs. (2007). *Tomorrow's Skills: Towards a National Skills Strategy.* Expert Working Group on Future's Skills Needs: Ireland.

27 Levels 1 and 2 are for people who are seeking to develop basic skills that are equivalent to those fostered in primary education such as basic literacy and numeracy. Completion of a Level 3 award would be equivalent to attainment of the Junior Certificate.

28 Government of Ireland. (2008). *Development and State of the Art of Adult Learning and Education in Ireland.* Department of Education and Science: Ireland.

29 Taskforce on Active Citizenship. (2007). *Report of the Taskforce on Active Citizenship.* Secretariat of Taskforce on Active Citizenship: Dublin.

Since the White Paper, the only other policy provisions specific to community education were the Education Equality Initiative (described below) and the 2009 increase in 2000 places for BTEI as a result of the national social partnership agreement *Towards 2016*.[30] However, recent policy documents have articulated a continuing role for community education: in visioning adequate community-based educational opportunities for older people[31]; ensuring a return to education for adults who are hard to reach, and meeting the needs of older people, single parents, adults in disadvantaged areas and early school leavers.[32]

The recent economic downturn and the length of time since the White Paper has seen the policy environment change vastly, but with no recent national guidelines for DES funded community education.

Tracking the Wider Benefits of Learning

Trying to systematically ascertain the impact of education by tracking its outcomes is a fairly recent project. It reflects a move in education research from looking at inputs, participation rates and progression to tracking all the benefits of learning including civic, social, and health outcomes and those related to further education, training and employment. This section details the rationale for this project.

Making Visible the Non-economic Benefits of Learning

Holistic monitoring of educational outcomes is seen to be important as an antidote to a human capital or neo-liberal agenda for adult learning in western nations. Under this agenda, "work constitutes the single, strongest, integrative and cohesive mechanism in society."[33] This emphasis results in those educational outcomes that are considered valuable becoming the, "surrogate for qualifications employers want."[34] Instead, many academics and educators wish to ensure that the economy is not seen as a "proxy for

30 Government of Ireland. (2006). *Towards 2016 Ten-Year Framework Social Partnership Agreement 2006-2015*. Government Stationary Office: Dublin.

31 Ibid.

32 Government of Ireland. (2008). *Development and State of the Art of Adult Learning and Education in Ireland*. Department of Education and Science: Ireland.

33 Glastra et al. (2004). "Lifelong Learning as Transitional Learning." In *Adult Education Quarterly*. 54(4). 298.

34 Baptiste, I. (2001). "Educating Lone Wolves: pedagogical Implications of Human Capital Theory." In *Adult Education Quarterly*. 51(3). 184-201.

social well-being"[35] and that the civic and social effects of education are emphasised as necessary to the functioning of democracy and achievement of equality.

We might question whether or not this debate is applicable to the Irish and European context where there is a stated desire to embrace educational outcomes related to human capital, social capital and collective transformation. At EU level the competences prioritised for lifelong learning include those related not just to the labour market but also civic competence.[36] In Ireland, the White Paper stated the importance of learning for individual and collective development.

However, Finnegan indicates that the case is quite strong for a neo-liberal agenda in Ireland.[37] In particular he tracks the State's increasing commitment to this agenda through increased deregulation and privatisation during the Celtic Tiger years, an emphasis by politicians in public life on the country's profitability and Ireland's status as the world's third freest economy. The author then asserts that as the provision of adult education is subject to the State it is also subject to a neo-liberal agenda. He contends that many of the recent recommendations for lifelong learning in Ireland see it "conceptualized largely in terms of maintaining a flexible and competitive economy in the modern 'knowledge society'."

This trend is evident in *The National Skills Strategy,* which offers targets for the supply of marketable skills to address gaps in Ireland's economy in order to enhance productivity.

Grummel also contends that the Irish Government pays lip service to the rhetoric of adult education for social inclusion, but that the system has been colonised by a neo-liberal agenda.[38] The focus is on adult learning which supports "the unproblematic self-development of the individual."

35 Ballatti, J. and I. Falk. (2002). "Socioeconomic Contributions of Adult Learning to Community: a Social Capital Perspective." In *Adult Education Quarterly.* 52 (4). 281-298.

36 Commission of the European Communities. (2005). *Proposal for a RECOMMENDATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL on key competences for lifelong learning.* Commission of the European Communities: Brussels. 13. This document sets out the eight key competences that EU countries should seek to foster in strategic provision of lifelong learning opportunities.

37 Finnegan, F. (2008). "Neo-Liberalism, Irish Society and Adult Education." In *The Adult Learner.* 2008.

38 Grummel, B. (2007). "The 'Second Chance' Myth: equality of Opportunity in Irish Adult Education Policies." In *British Journal of Educational Studies.* 55(2). 182-201.

2 INTRODUCTION

When a human capital approach is applied to adult education policy outcomes like participation rates, numbers of individuals achieving accreditation and learning that results in building skills for the labour market are prioritised.[39] However, these outcomes may not necessarily tell us how learning has actually happened[40] nor does it embrace a key element of adult learning, which is the intent of the learner.

In addition, it negates the more radical purpose of adult education, which is collective empowerment and transformation for marginalised groups in society. Many would say that if state funding of education becomes dependent on outcomes related to the market, the state abnegates its responsibility to promote democracy and citizenship through education.[41]

The desire for those who oppose a neo-liberal agenda for adult learning is to make visible and track learning outcomes related to "forms of education that provide a new ethic of freedom and a reassertion of collective identity as central preoccupations of a vibrant democratic culture and society."[42]

The research presented here sought to show to what extent community education achieves outcomes related to the development of participatory democracy and empowerment, which it is meant to foster. Likewise, it tracked whether or not community education faces obstacles to achieving civic and democratic outcomes.

39 Ibid.

40 Vorhaus, T. (2000). "Learning Outcomes in a Non-accredited Curriculum: a View from the Adult Education Sector." In *Outcomes of Learning: Taking the Debate Forward*. H. Jones and J. Mace eds. Further Education Development Agency: UK.

41 Giroux, H.A. (2004). "Neoliberalism and the Demise of Democracy: Resurrecting Hope in Dark Times." www.dissidentvoice.org

42 Ibid.

Demonstrating Value for Money of State Investment

From a policy-making perspective the need to look at outcomes stems from a requirement to understand if ever increasing investment in education is an effective use of State money.

Positive benefits accrued through education can save the State money. For instance, the European Assocation for the Education of Adults said in a recent report, "High social returns generated by educational investment diminish the need for expenditure in other areas such as unemployment benefits, welfare payments, pensions, social insurance and healthcare. The social return on adult learning, with special regard to basic skills for adults, may be between 10% to 20%."[43] A UK source indicates, "[Adult] educational participation has a range of non-economic benefits that extend beyond the classroom into personal life and the community... adult learning might do better than it tends to in the battle for education resources."[44]

Tracking the wider benefits of learning can help to show the role of education in these other public policy arenas. Education can obviously help to achieve other goals important to democracy and citizen well-being such as the development of civic competence, adoption of health enhancing behaviours, a positive attitude towards diversity and prevention of poverty. These can have follow-on consequences in terms of the achievement of social inclusion.

This research sought to assess the degree to which community education contributes to the achievement of outcomes important in other public policy arenas such as health and family well-being.

43 European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA). (2006). *Adult Education Trends and Issues*. EAEA: Brussels. 18.

44 Feinstein et al. (2003). *Contribution of Adult Learning to Health and Social Capital*. Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning: UK. iv.

Addressing Gaps in Research

A key challenge to documenting outcomes is that there has not been enough valid, rigorous research carried out that could form the basis for internationally comparable indicators. These could help to monitor the effectiveness of education systems over the long-term.

There is a dearth of research distinguishing between different types of education and whether potential social effects differ from one approach to the next.[45] Of the evidence that is available, the benefit of adult and informal learning often goes unrecognised[46] in favour of an emphasis on the effects of formal schooling. However, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development contends, "the benefit of learning in later life may be substantial."[47] According to this well-respected international think tank, "distinguishing these different modes and levels of education is essential in order to give the analysis [of outcomes] a strong policy link, and specifically to open up debate on alternative patterns of investment."[48]

The value of this research to the context painted here is to distinguish community education and its potential impacts from other types of adult learning.

Outcomes and Indicators

A learning or educational outcome can be simply defined as the consequence of participation in education and "that it is a causally related outcome of a period of teaching or a specified period of education."[49] Ascertaining causality is a key operational challenge for researching educational outcomes.

It is generally accepted that outcomes of learning benefit learners by helping them to accrue human capital and social capital:

45 OECD. (2007). *Understanding the Social Outcomes of Learning*. OECD: France.

46 Ibid. 14

47 Ibid. 36

48 Ibid. 36

49 Lavender, P. (2000). "Learning Outcomes: towards a Synthesis of Progress." In NIACE. *Outcomes of Adult Learning – taking the Debate Forward*. NIACE: UK. 9.

Human Capital is the "knowledge, skills, competences and attributes embodied in individuals that facilitate the creation of personal, social and economic well-being."[50] However, the concept tends to be narrowly understood as the bank of skills necessary to meet the needs of the economy and that produces economic actors, thereby prioritising marketable skills as opposed to skills, which are necessary for personal and social well-being.[51]

Social Capital is a concept that is not easily defined and, "no single definition of social capital has won consensus."[52] Broadly, it has to do with the bank of skills and knowledge that allow us to access and participate in relationships that can help us to gain valued resources. Ability to use social networks and participate in groups are skills that develop social capital.

Many acknowledge that human capital cannot be developed without social capital as learning is a social activity that is not successful unless relationships amongst learners can allow them to draw on the shared knowledge of the group for individual acquisition of skills, "only through social capital are the skills and knowledge of human capital made available for the benefit of individuals, communities and in regions in which they live and society at large." [53]

Individuals can accrue social and human capital, as can societies. Thus, the link between outcomes and indicators becomes clear. In the context of this research, indicators are quantitative measurements of learning outcomes that assist the development of social and human capital. Indicators can show what is in the 'bank' for individuals, communities and nations, as a result of the performance of education systems.

50 OECD. (2001). *The Well-being of Nations: the Role of Human and Social Capital.* OECD: France.

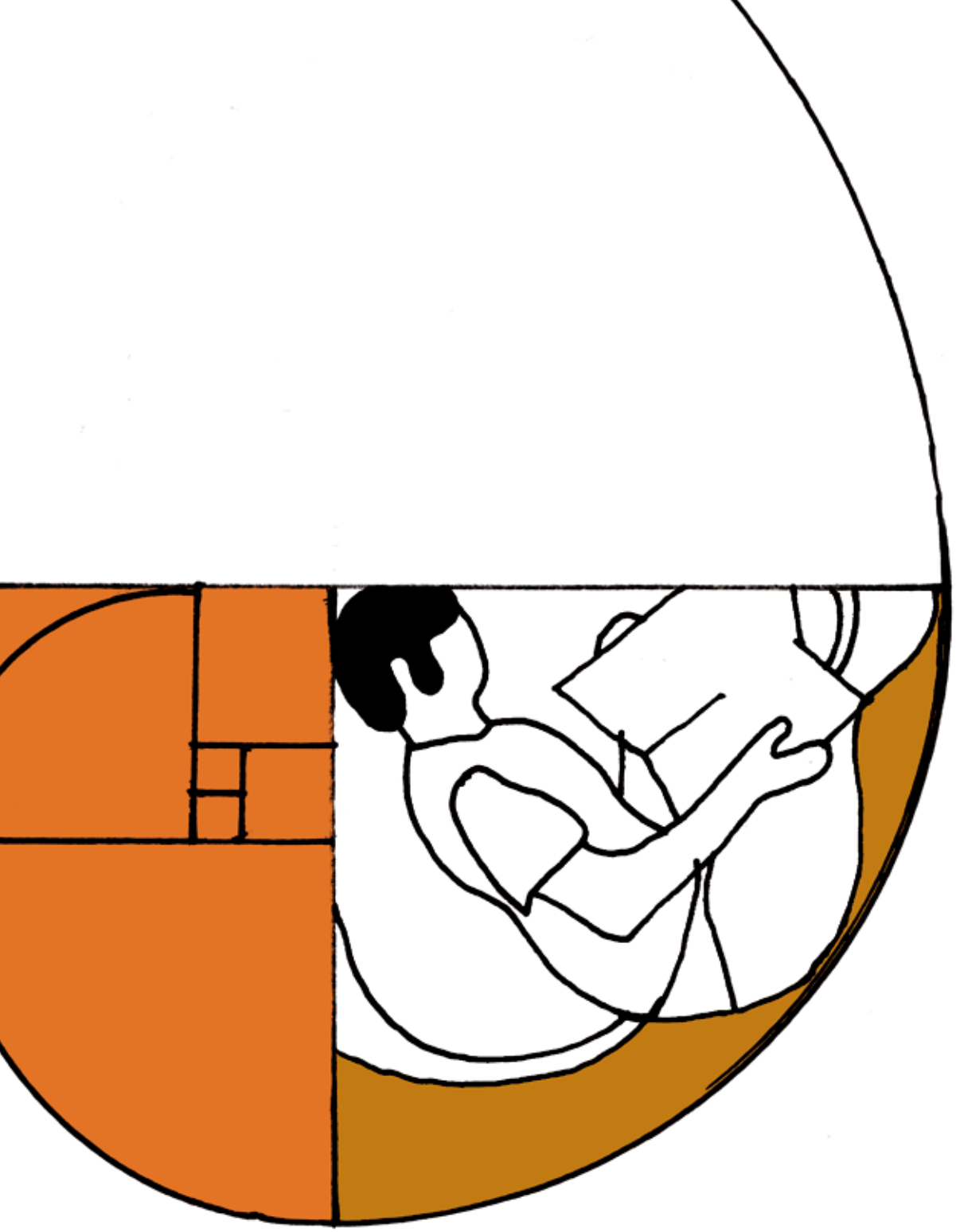
51 Baptiste, I. (2001). "Educating Lone Wolves: pedagogical Implications of Human Capital Theory." *In Adult Education Quarterly.* 51(3). 184-201.

52 Ballatti, J. and I. Falk. (2002). "Socioeconomic Contributions of Adult Learning to Community: a Social Capital Perspective." In *Adult Education Quarterly.* 52 (4). 281-298.

53 Ibid.

2 INTRODUCTION

The research presented here illuminates whether community education facilitates some, or all of the outcomes that can help individuals and communities develop social and human capital. Because there is not yet an adequate evidence base for how different types of education have an impact, the literature suggests that this research can make recommendations for indicators for the impact of community education, but these will not be definitive without further empirical research.



3 WHO IS COMMUNITY EDUCATION FOR?

We offer learning in an environment, which is open and welcoming and friendly [we hope that people] will change their minds about education. [Also want to ensure] parents are in a position to support children's learning. It's about getting parents to value themselves. When people find they have loads of abilities and skills it travels over to every facet of their lives. Our job is to provide the sort of learning that people in this community want and to provide it in a way that is easily accessible to them (case study provider #9).

INTRODUCTION

This chapter details Government guidelines for the priority target groups for community education and the most up-to-date reports about participants from DES. The profile of participants from the learners survey carried out for the research is explored to supply further detail about the characteristics of community education learners.[54] Discussions from the qualitative research are also used to answer the question about who community education is for.

The main points in this chapter are:

- DES funded community education is, for the most part, meeting an overall aim to provide opportunities to disadvantaged learners as 74% of ALCES learners belong to at least one of the priority target groups for this strand. Disadvantaged learners are also effectively targeted in the BTEI Community Strand.
- Some of the priority target groups for community education are well represented in ALCES community education. For instance 45% of people 16-64 left school at lower secondary or before, and 36% had a disability.
- However, the results validate that other target groups for ALCES community education such as lone parents, disadvantaged men, the homeless, younger people with disabilities, Travellers and ethnic minorities, and the unemployed are being less effectively targeted for community education as the proportion of learners in these categories is quite small.
- Programmes funded under the BTEI Community Strand have higher representation of the main priority target groups for both ALCES and BTEI community education including, disadvantaged men, the unemployed, and lone parents.

54 Please note that all percentages presented have been rounded up or down. Therefore, numbers in tables may not always add up to 100%.

- Community education's stated role in engaging disadvantaged learners is borne out by the results of the research, but it seems there is still a tendency to recruit traditional target groups such as women and older people as opposed to more hard-to-reach groups.
- The results raise a question about the extent to which policy-makers and providers would like to see different target groups represented in community education.

BACKGROUND

There are clear target groups for the provision of BTEI Community Strand programmes. Since 2009 the priority target groups tracked for community education funded through the ALCES budget have been aligned to the BTEI Community Strand reporting templates. The target groups reflect those prioritised in the *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion* and also in European Social Fund requirements. [55] The decision to use the same priority target groups for ALCES community education was made by the Department, in order to glean a more detailed understanding of the characteristics of those participating. The priority target groups for these strands combined are set out below.

Table 3.1 Target Groups for DES Funded Community Education

Target Groups BTEI Community Strand	Early school leavers; the long-term unemployed and those at risk; those not in work but not eligible to be on the Live Register; those in the workplace with basic skills needs; disadvantaged women; disadvantaged men; lone parents and other carers who cannot participate in full-time courses; Travellers; homeless people; substance misusers; ex-offenders; people with disabilities; English as a second language speakers who need literacy/ language supports
ALCES Community Education Reporting Template	People with disabilities, early school leavers, unemployed, substance misusers, ex-offenders, one-parent family, Traveller, homeless people, refugees, asylum-seekers, migrant workers

What is clear is the State's emphasis on provision of community education to disadvantaged groups in Irish society.

55 Government of Ireland. (2007). *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion, 2007-2016*. Government Stationary Office: Dublin. Also see Government of Ireland. (2007). *Human Capital Investment Operational Programme: 2007-2013*. Government Stationary Office: Dublin.

The Needs of Disadvantaged Groups

Since community education has a stated role in addressing the educational needs of disadvantaged groups in Irish society it is useful to turn to a brief review of those needs for some of the main groups.

A key facet of community education is that it seeks to build the self-esteem of learners the lack of which is attributed to discrimination. The literature is replete with the documented social exclusion of many of the target groups stated above.

A recent report about early school leaving (ESL) in Ireland found that 9000 people leave school before the Leaving Certificate every year and this figure has remained steady since the mid-1990s.[56] The same report also found that the majority of people in this cohort are young men. The authors found that ESL comes about as a result of negative relationships with teachers, challenges associating with peers, a disturbed classroom environment and a poor academic impression of themselves. They conclude that there should be more opportunities to complete the Leaving Certificate outside of school and that education must be 'flexible, relevant, challenging and rewarding.'[57] ESL would be a feature of the experience of many of the stated target groups for community education, including the Travelling community.

The Education Equality Initiative was a Government action designed to engender learning about educational disadvantage for policy and practice. Many community education groups were funded through this programme. This programme, "confirmed that adult educational disadvantage is a multi-dimensional reality incorporating economic, social, cultural, psychological and education elements and the result of a combination of factors working to marginalize men and women and impede access to structured learning."[58] In 2005, the now disbanded Educational Disadvantage Committee put forward a similar understanding of adult educational disadvantage and recommended mainstreaming of the best practice honed through the EEI.[59]

56 Byrne, D and E. Smyth. (2009). *No Way Back the Dynamics of Early School Leaving.* ESRI: Dublin.

57 Ibid. 183.

58 Keogh, H. (2007). *Education Equality Initiative: Lessons and Impact.* Department of Education and Skills: Ireland. 4.

59 Educational Disadvantage Committee. (2005). *Moving Beyond Educational Disadvantage: Report of the Educational Disadvantage Committee: 2002-2005.* Government Stationary Office: Dublin.

3 WHO IS COMMUNITY EDUCATION FOR?

A key idea for this programme was to plan educational interventions that avoided the 'Matthew Effect', which meant that those adults who had higher education would be more likely to engage in and have the resources necessary to persist with learning. Those with low education levels would be less likely to engage and intensive effort would need to be made by providers to ensure successful participation. This work involved removal of barriers for target groups using an interagency approach, outreach to recruit learners and the use of highly skilled tutors.[60]

Community education has a long tradition of working with women through small community-based women's groups, many of which operate in disadvantaged communities using the kinds of the strategies named in the paragraph above. The needs of women in education arise from the structural inequalities they face including isolation in the home due to their performance of most of the caring duties, lack of self-esteem from being viewed as subordinate citizens, and for many, income and educational disadvantage.[61] Women are over-represented in the lone parent category a status that still carries with it stigma and the risk of poverty.[62] Women's community education responds to these needs by working towards the individual development of women, but also their collective development by fostering gender analysis. Many women's community education groups also work at a political level to lobby for change.[63]

For older people adult learning works to prevent their isolation and social exclusion as they grow older and to help them maintain well-being.[64 / 65] A recent BTEI report indicated the need for male learners to be able to access vocational learning in both the formal and community strands that targets local employment, integrates basic skills and emphasises appropriate certification options.[66]

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60 Ibid.

61 WERRC. (2001). *Women at the Forefront: the Role of Women's Community Education Groups in Combating Poverty and Disadvantage.* AONTAS: Dublin.

62 Murphy, C. et al. (2008). *Lone Parents and Employment – What are the Real Issues.* One Family: Dublin.

63 AONTAS. (2009). *Flower Power: guide to the Best Practice of Women's Community Education.* AONTAS: Dublin.

64 Tracy, P. et al. (2005). *Loneliness and Social Isolation Among Older Irish People.* NCAOP: Ireland.

65 AONTAS. *Don't Stop me Now: a Report on the Lifelong Learning Needs of Older People in Ireland.* AONTAS: Dublin.

66 AONTAS. (2008). *Increasing Men's Participation in Adult Learning.* Department of Education and Science: Ireland.

National Profile

In 2009 approximately 2,304 individuals participated in BTEI Community Strand funding, 73% female and 27% male.

Table 3.2 Target Groups BTEI (Part-time) Community Strand 2009[67]

Target Group	Percentage
Person with Disability	20
Substance Misuser	3
Ex-offender	1
Early School Leaver	29
One-Parent Family	19
Traveller	3
Homeless	0.3
ESOL Participant	4
Refugee	0.3
Asylum Seeker	2
Less than upper second level education	71
Over 55 years (not priority target group)	19
Unemployed	33
Migrant Worker	3
Other	30

The number of learners funded through the ALCES budget in 2009 was 55, 716, 22% male and 78% female.[68] This figure was down 1.5% from 2008. A breakdown of participants by target group for 2008 and 2009 is considered below.

67 Target Groups presented as a % of total participants nationally or 2,304. The percentages in this table will not equal 100 as individuals may be belong to more than one target group.

68 At time of publication the 2009 City of Cork VEC returns were not available so the 2008 figure for this VEC was used as a proxy to calculate the total number of learners. Percentages in this table will not equal 100% as learners could belong to more than one target group.

Table 3.3 Percentage Target Groups ALCES Budget 2008/2009[69]

Target Group	2008	2009
Person with Disability/ Rehabilitation	12	15
Substance Misuser	n/a	1
Ex-offender	.05	0
Early School Leaver	1	17
One-Parent Family	.77	4
Traveller	1	2
Homeless	.9	.4
Refugee	n/a	.1
Asylum Seeker	n/a	2
Migrant Worker	n/a	2
Less than upper second level education	n/a	n/a
Over 55 years/ Older People	22[70]	42
Unemployed	2	39
Disadvantaged	16	n/a
Other	44	58

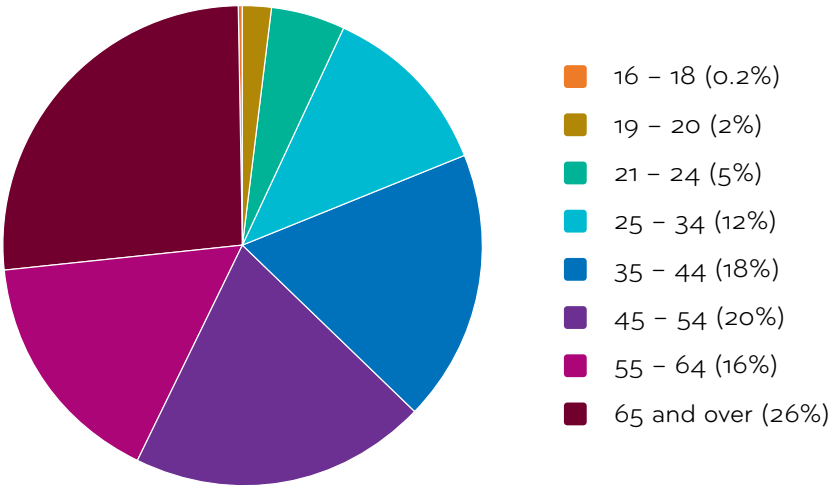
For the 10,445 learners whose employment status could be gleaned 39% were unemployed while 45% were not in the labour market. The table above shows that over 2008 to 2009 there was an increase in the number of individuals in the disability, early school leaver, lone parent, 55+, Traveller and unemployed target groups.

The ages of 24,408 learners were ascertained and their profile is set out in the figure over leaf.

69 The percentages are calculated from the total of number of learners for which a target group could be designated N=32,534. This figure does not match the actual number of learners as some VECs were unable to collect the information needed and City of Cork's returns were not available.

70 This percentage is derived from assignment to the older people/ active age target groups in the returns as at that time DES did not seek information on the ages of learners. Therefore, the percentage of people over 55 could be higher than this figure.

Figure 3.1 National Age Profile Learners[71]



As we can see many learners are 65+ (26%), with more than half in the 45+ age categories (62%).

The data gathered at national level for ALCES in 2009 must be taken cautiously since not all VECs were able to track the data needed for the DES returns. This challenge arose as the new DES templates were created after recruitment of 2009 clients and many VECs' client intake forms did not reflect the new data categories. The Department and VECs are working together to progress more comprehensive data collection about the characteristics of community education learners.

SOCIAL INCLUSION INDICATORS

Social inclusion strategies are those sets of actions, which work to realise the minimum entitlement of individuals to status, resources, work and power. Ireland has signed up to a standard set of indicators for social inclusion for EU member states to track how its policies related to social inclusion are resulting in measurable improvements

71 Calculated from the 24,408 learners whose ages were recorded. Does not include City of Cork VEC.

and contributing to the achievement of equality. These were developed to align with overarching objectives related to social cohesion, and interaction with the Lisbon Strategy, which is the European Union's commitment to fostering prosperity in Europe. There are a set of overarching indicators and then three portfolios for health, pensions and social inclusion. The rates relevant to these indicators that are tracked through the research are:

- Numbers of early school leavers
- Material deprivation
- Long-term unemployment
- Unemployment/ Participation in the labour market – activity rate[72]

The research will show if community education is working with learners who are living with social exclusion as indicated by these rates.

Relevant Results

This section details the profile of the respondents to the learners survey as well as qualitative data reflecting on who community education is for. The results of the survey are representative, meaning that they reflect trends in the national cohort of ALCES learners from the 2008 DES returns. The sampling frame was developed from these statistics.[73]

Profile of Survey Respondents

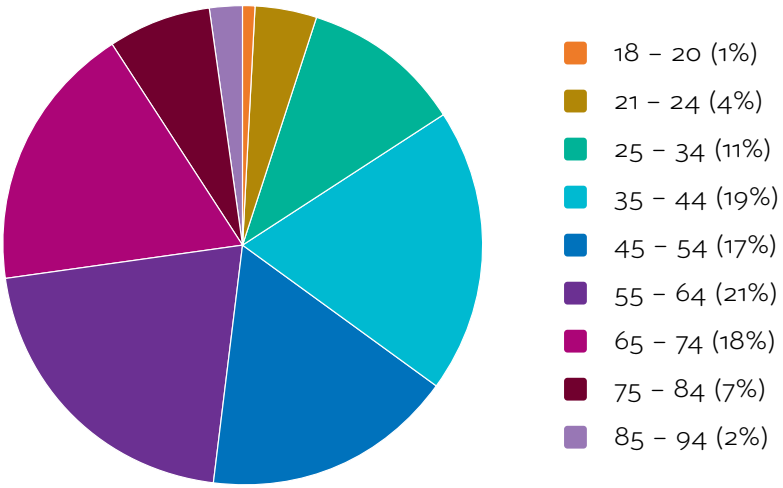
Approximately 683 learners completed a survey detailing their demographic characteristics, their experience of community education and the outcomes they felt they experienced as a result. Eighty-five percent of the learners were women and 15% were men. This representative sample of learners can give us some more in-depth information about learners nationally as it can be generalized to the national profile.

From the figure below we can see that 27% of the survey respondents were over 65 years of age. Virtually the rest of the participants were of working age. However, a large proportion of them were in the 55-64 age bracket. None were in the 16-17 age bracket.

72 EU Commission, Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. (2008). *PORTFOLIO OF OVERARCHING INDICATORS AND STREAMLINED SOCIAL INCLUSION, PENSIONS, AND HEALTH PORTFOLIOS , APRIL 2008 UPDATE*. EU Commission: Brussels.

73 We cannot tell to what extent the survey population reflects the 2009 national cohort as the data categories for ALCES funded community education changed for this year.

Figure 3.2 Percentage Age of Learners



Sixty-two percent of the sample reported that they lived in a rural area (small town or village or rural area) while 38% indicated that they lived in an urban area. Fifty-nine percent indicated that they were married while 21% said they were single (never married). Eight percent said they were separated or divorced and 13% indicated they were widowed.

Less than half the sample had dependent children (42%). Of those who said they were single, separated, widowed or divorced 81 or 12% of the sample said they had dependent children meaning they were parenting alone. This figure is lower than the national lone parent dependency rate of 21.3%. In the sample only five percent were parenting alone and in receipt of the One-Parent Family Payment. The average household composition was two people over 14 years of age with one child under 14 years of age.

Around 10% of the sample indicated that they were not Irish, which is in line with the national population. The most often named cultural background was 'other white Irish' (5%). Twenty-six respondents identified themselves as African or Asian and four respondents said they were members of the Travelling community.

Thirty-six percent of the sample indicated that they had long-term conditions, with the majority reporting that they had a physical disability. When we compare age against those with long-term conditions we can see that people over the age of 45 were most likely

to indicate that they had physical or sight/hearing impairments while people under 44 were more likely to indicate mental or emotional problems. The relatively high number of people with disabilities is consistent with the significant number of people who are 55+ in the sample.

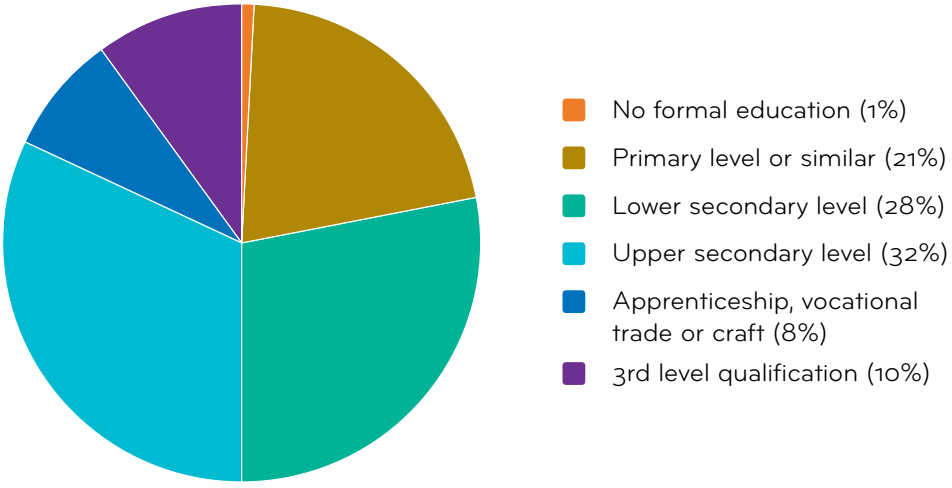
The majority of learners lived in a house or bungalow (94%) and owned their own house (73%). Twelve percent rented from the local authority and no-one was homeless.

Sixty percent of learners indicated that they drove a car to their course with 23% saying they walked. Ten percent said they got a lift by car.

Education and Employment

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of education when they left school for the first time. Results are set out in the figure below.

Figure 3.3 Percentage Education Levels of Learners



We can see that the vast majority of respondents (82%) left school at upper secondary or less and half (50%) finished their education at lower secondary or below. Educational levels of respondents are broken down by age in the table below.

Table 3.4 Education Level when left School for First Time by Age

	Primary/lower secondary		Secondary		Post secondary	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
16 – 24 yrs	14	50	11	39	3	11
25 – 44 yrs	54	32	65	39	48	29
45 – 64 yrs	116	54	69	32	30	14
65+ yrs	94	63	36	24	20	13
Total	278	50	181	32	101	18

From this table we can see that those in the sample who left school with lower secondary or less tend to be in the 45-64 year age bracket.

In the table below we compare the education levels of the sample against the general population.

Table 3.5 Education Level (when left school for first time; includes only participants aged 16 – 64) of Sample Compared to General Population[74]

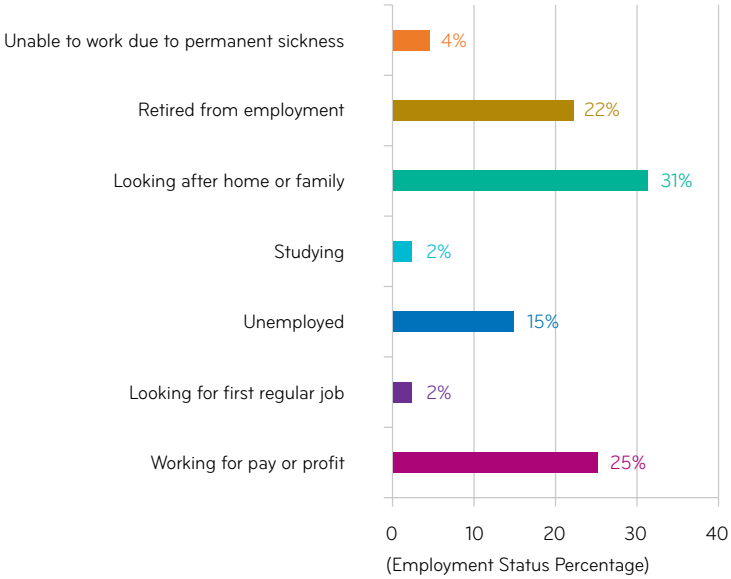
Education level	Sample Percentage	Population Percentage
No formal education	1	14
Primary level of similar	15.1	
Lower secondary level	28.8	20
upper secondary level	35.4	28
Apprenticeship, vocational, trade or raft	8.5	--
3rd level qualification	11.2	29

The table above shows that around 45% of the sample between 16-64 left school at lower secondary or before compared to 34% of the general population. More individuals in the sample left school at upper secondary (35.4%) than the general population (28%). Also rates of post-secondary education in the sample (19.7%)are lower than that of the general population (29%).

74 The census education figures relate to education status at time of census rather than highest level of education achieved. For this reason our sample was compared to figures from the CSO. (2008). *Quarterly National Household Survey Special Module on Educational Attainment – Quarter 2, 2002 to Quarter 2 2008*. CSO: Ireland. These figures includes all persons aged 15-64.

Respondents were also asked what their employment status was at the time they began community education. The results are set out in the figure below.

Figure 3.4 Percentage Employment Status of Learners



From the figure above we can see that half the sample were either looking after home or family or retired. The large number of retired respondents is consistent with the significant number of older people in the sample. Forty-six percent of the people in the looking after home or family or retired categories were 65+.

For the purposes of this analysis we will take the 25-64 age bracket to be of working age as very few of the sample were under 25. In this category (n=453) 27% were looking after home or family, 38% were working and 26% were unemployed or looking for their first time job. These figures show that more than half of the people who are working age were unemployed or not in the labour market. Men in the sample were more likely than women to be unemployed (43% of men) while women were more likely than men to be looking after home or family (36% of women). Twenty-six percent of the sample considered of working age were unemployed compared to the national unemployment rate of 13.2%.[75] The long-term unemployment rate in this sample is 7.4% compared to 5.9% nationally.[76]

75 Central Statistics Office. (2010). *Quarterly National Household Survey, Quarter Two 2010*. CSO: Ireland.

76 Ibid.

Sixty-nine percent of the respondents were in receipt of some kind of social welfare entitlement or scheme, 40% of those were in receipt of the medical card. Thirty-eight percent indicated that they were on one of the main payments or allowances.[77] Thirteen percent reported they were in receipt of a non-contributory pension. Twelve percent of the sample indicated they were on 'other' types of payments, which for the most part, were contributory State pensions. The high levels of those in receipt of the medical card is consistent with the large number of people of retirement age in the sample.

Learners were also asked about their income levels before starting community education and currently. The table below shows the results of this question.

Table 3.6 Learners Average Weekly Disposable Income Before and After

Income	Before		After	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Less than €100 per week	37	9	25	6
€101 – €200 per week	87	21	82	19
€201 – €300 per week	129	30	132	31
€301 – €400 per week	59	14	66	16
€401 – €500 per week	49	12	50	12
€501 – €600 per week	22	5	21	5
€601 – €700 per week	16	4	22	5
€701 – €800 per week	9	2	9	2
€801 – €900 per week	5	1	6	1
€901 – €1,000 per week	6	1	4	1
Over €1,000 per week	5	1	4	1
Total	424	100	421	100

The most common income band reported was 201-300 euro per week both before and after participation. Fourteen percent of the people who answered this question had experienced an increase in income during their time in community education while a large percent (81%) had experienced no change.

77 Such as Jobseeker's Benefit, Farm Assist or the Back-to-Work Allowance. Those in receipt of a scheme or supplementary payment, i.e. Family Income Supplement were not included in this figure.

In 2007, the average household disposable income in Ireland was €21,694[78] per annum. Using the modal response of the sample here, we find the participants, on average, appear to have less household disposable income than the national average at €15,600 per annum.

Deprivation

Thirty-eight percent of the research sample indicated that they were experiencing one of the deprivation measures tracked through the research. This figure compares to 11.1% of the national population. These measures refer to whether or not someone is experiencing forms of material poverty like not being able to afford new clothes, ordinary living expenses or food.

Unpaid Work and Volunteering

Learners were asked about any unpaid work that they engaged in. Twenty-eight percent of the sample engaged in caring work, the majority of those (22%) for 1-14 hours per week, while 72% did none. This rate is far higher than the national rate for carers of 4.8% of the total population.[79] Learners were also asked to indicate if they were involved in any volunteering activity. The results of that question compared to national statistics from Census 2006 are in the table below.

Table 3.7 Percentage Engaged in Voluntary Work per Week

Voluntary work	Learners	National[80]
Volunteered for social/charity org in last 4 weeks	29	6
Volunteered for a religious group or church in last 4 weeks	17	4
Volunteered for a sports org in last 4 weeks	7	5
Volunteered for a political or cultural org in last 4 weeks	4	1
Did some other type of voluntary work in last 4 weeks	18	4
Did no voluntary work in last 4 weeks	43	83

The table shows that 57% of the sample was engaged in some type of voluntary activity. These rates are far higher than the national figures for volunteering. The bulk of learners engaged in voluntary work did so for 1-5 hours per week (77%).

78 www.cso.ie

79 see www.cso.ie Census Reports for 2006.

80 ibid

Extent of Disadvantage within the Survey Sample

If we take membership of priority target groups to be a marker of disadvantage in the sample we can analyse the total proportion of the sample that are disadvantaged. The results of questions from the survey that ascertained membership of target groups are set out in the table below.

Table 3.8 Percentage of Sample from Priority Target Groups ALCES Community Education

Target Group	Percentage
Unemployed or looking for first paid job	14
Not Irish nationality/ Traveller	9
Primary or lower secondary education only	50
Disability	36
In receipt of one-parent family payment	5
Homeless	0
Any one of the above	74

From the table we can see that 74% of the sample belongs to at least one of the priority target groups that were tracked through the survey.

Qualitative Results

In interviews, case study providers were asked which target groups they provided community education for and which issues they responded to. Strategic interviewees were asked who they thought community education was for. This section summarises themes emerging from the data in regard to these aspects of the research.

An emphasis on the most disadvantaged

All of the strategic interviewees indicated that community education should or does make an effort to target the most marginalised in their communities and named some or all of the target groups articulated by the State, "If I had a priority it is about trying to see education and human development among those that are most marginalised, [I] acknowledge that marginalisation is not one and the same thing its not just one single [thing]" (strategic interviewee #6).

All of the provider case studies except for one indicated that their courses were for people living with the social exclusion issues experienced within their specific geographic setting.

All of the learners interviewed for the case studies were from the target groups mentioned by the State. All but four had upper secondary or less education levels. Nine had left school at lower secondary or below. Many described feelings of alienation from first chance education or having experienced barriers in their lives that prevented them from continuing their education after school. For instance, one learner said, "I had no school, I was the youngest of 11 and when you were old enough to work you went to work" (present learner #4). Another reflected, "I wasn't asked do I want to do the intercert, children were handpicked to do it, I left school at 14 and had to stay home and look after my mother" (past learner #1).

Most case study learners reflected experiencing a lack of self-confidence prior to their participation in community education, "I was so unbelievably shy" (past learner #6).

Those who are most marginalised were described by strategic interviewees as requiring community education because they needed education to be brought to them, "It tends to be for people who don't have confidence in the first instance" (strategic interviewee #9).

There was some debate in terms of which target groups should be prioritised for community education. Two of the strategic interviewees highlighted the debate about the balance of participation between older people and other target groups in community education. One of these interviewees questioned whether or not that target group would be attending programmes run according to community education principles in disadvantaged areas.

Five of the strategic interviewees indicated the continuing challenge of engaging marginalised men in community education.

You don't know what goes on in people's lives

While the majority of interviewees and case study providers emphasized that the most marginalized should be targeted for community education, many pointed out that it was also for everyone in a community. All were very clear that community education was defined by its provision within the community setting.

There was debate about people attending community education, who at first glance, would not appear to be marginalised, particularly if they have more than upper secondary education. One strategic interviewee describes this debate:

> "We don't know the personal circumstances of people or what goes on behind closed doors. Maybe they need this learning or this class situation as much or even more than some people if they have mental health issues going on. Maybe they're caring for someone, [or] they can't be out of their locality" (strategic interviewee #8).

Two of the strategic interviewees highlighted the way in which people who might be considered ineligible for community education, such as those with third level qualifications, can serve as a resource to a group, "Maybe people with those qualifications could be acting as leaders in the group encouraging others helping others who don't have those qualifications" (strategic interviewee #2).

Fear of continued recruitment 'to the middle'

Some of the strategic interviewees highlighted that community education was in danger of continuing to recruit the traditional target groups that have always availed of community education or were from target groups experiencing less marginalisation and found it easy to access resources in their communities, "It slightly saddens me that we haven't really managed the engagement of men… we like to think we reach those that adult education can't reach… we recruit to the middle and recruit the same target groups, the why would need some investigation" (strategic interviewee #1).

The challenge of recruiting less represented and more marginalised target groups was described by some of the strategic interviewees as rooted in a debate about whether or not providers or CEFs should let groups of learners come to them with the desire to engage in a course or should play more of an active role in starting up groups in response to local need, "those who have most, take most, are most amenable to coming back into taking up the opportunities" (strategic interviewee #9).

Analysis

The national data collected by DES about the BTEI Community Strand and ALCES community education combined with the survey research results presented in this chapter show the following key trends:

- From the survey, 48% of learners were 55+ and this compares similarly to the national level data for 2009. This figure contrasts to 10% of learners belonging to this age bracket in the BTEI Community Strand.
- There are far more women than men. Only 15% of the survey sample was male. In comparison the BTEI Community Strand seems to have been more successful in recruiting men. Twenty-seven percent of learners in this strand were male. It would appear that ALCES community education has improved in its targeting of men from 2008 as 22% of learners for ALCES in 2009 were male.
- The majority of ALCES learners in the survey were from small towns or villages or rural areas (62%).
- Only 12% of the ALCES sample was parenting alone compared to the State lone parent rate[81] of 21.3%. However, in the BTEI Community Strand 19% of learners were lone parents.
- The levels of ethnic diversity in the learner's survey sample are similar to the national rate of 10%. These rates are broadly similar to the BTEI Community Strand (around nine percent).
- There are high rates of disability in the survey population (36%), but the high numbers of older learners in the sample may explain this feature. Twenty percent of learners in the BTEI Community Strand are living with a disability.
- There is educational disadvantage in the survey sample. Forty-five percent of learners 16-64 left school at lower secondary or before compared to 34% in the general population nationally. Both these rates are far lower than in the BTEI Community Strand where 71% of learners left school at second level or before.
- Thirty-eight percent of the survey sample experienced one of the material deprivation indicators compared to 11% nationally.
- There are also higher rates of unemployment and long-term unemployment in the sample compared to the national figures of 13.2% and 5.9%, with 38% in receipt of one of the main benefits or allowances.
- The average disposable income of the sample was 72% of the national average.
- There is a far higher rate of carers in the sample (22%) than the national rate of 4.8%.

81 The national lone parent rate is calculated as the percentage of lone parent families with at least one child under 15 as a proportion of all families with at least one child under 15. In the survey the lone parent rate was calculated as the proportion of learners not married with at least one dependent child (0-17 years or 18-24 years if still living at home).

- Learners from the survey sample are far more likely than the general population to volunteer. Fifty-seven percent of learners indicated they were involved in volunteering compared to 20% nationally.
- Seventy-four percent of the sample belonged to at least one of the priority target groups tracked through the survey indicating that the majority of the sample was disadvantaged. Since the majority of the sample was women we can tentatively conclude that many of them are disadvantaged.

The trends from the ALCES, BTEI and the survey data show that there is, as reported in the qualitative feedback, an emphasis on providing community education to some disadvantaged target groups in both ALCES and BTEI community education. However, there is still over recruitment of traditional target groups such as women and older people for ALCES community education.

In the qualitative interviews, targeting challenges were highlighted. Namely, strategic interviewees were concerned about the lack of recruitment of hard to reach groups and that the practice of waiting for groups to approach CEFs with a course idea may not be the most effective way to ensure that those groups participate in community education.

The case study learners all were experiencing some form of social exclusion showing that their providers were effectively targeting disadvantaged learners. However, the high number of BTEI Community Strand providers in the case studies, whose learners need to meet specific criteria, may explain this feature.

DISCUSSION

We can conclude from the analysis of the data presented in the chapter that ALCES funded community education is targeting disadvantaged learners for the most part. In terms of the target groups considered at the start of the chapter it appears that early school leavers and those with a disability are being targeted.

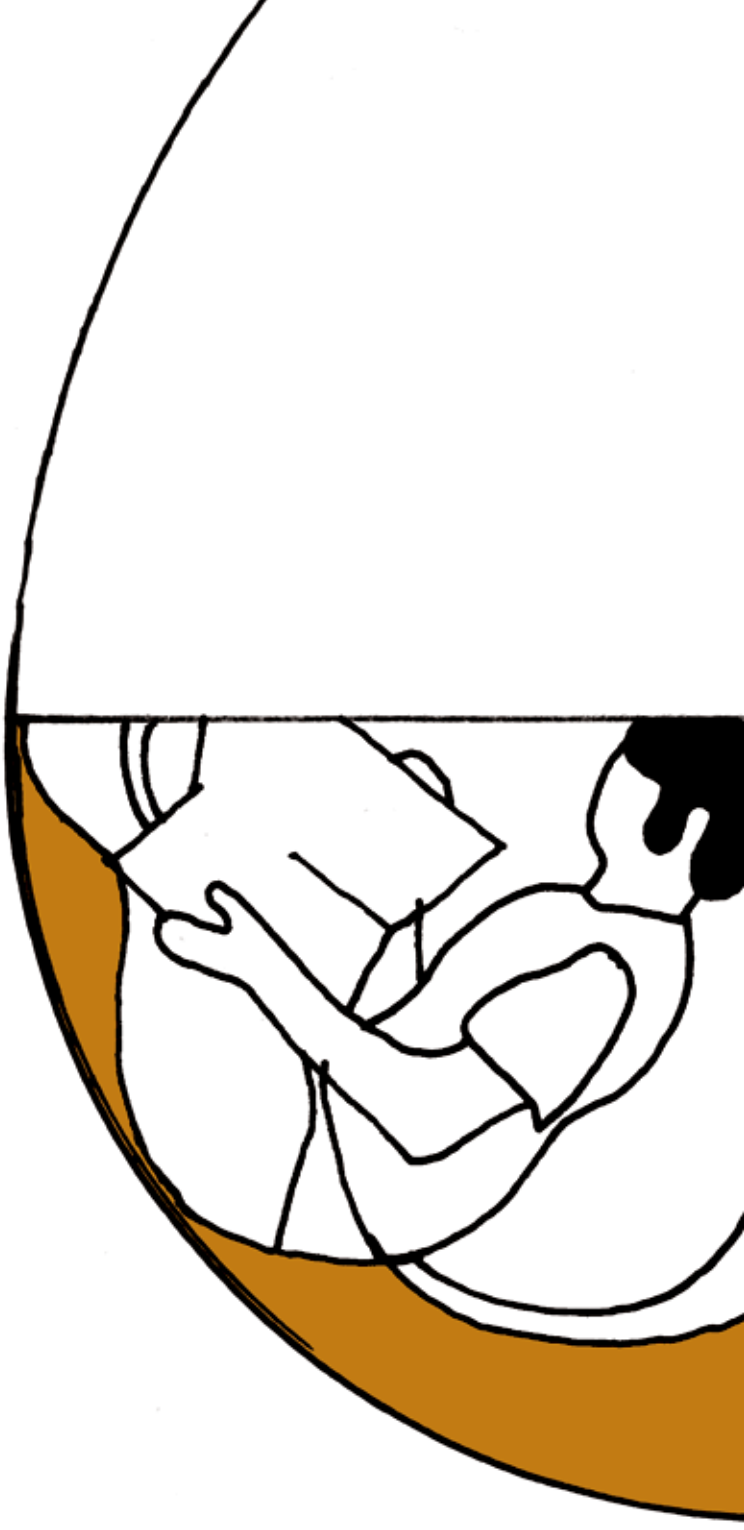
ALCES funded community education is also providing community education to non-priority target groups but ones that are considered in the literature to be disadvantaged such as carers, those not on the Live Register and disadvantaged women.

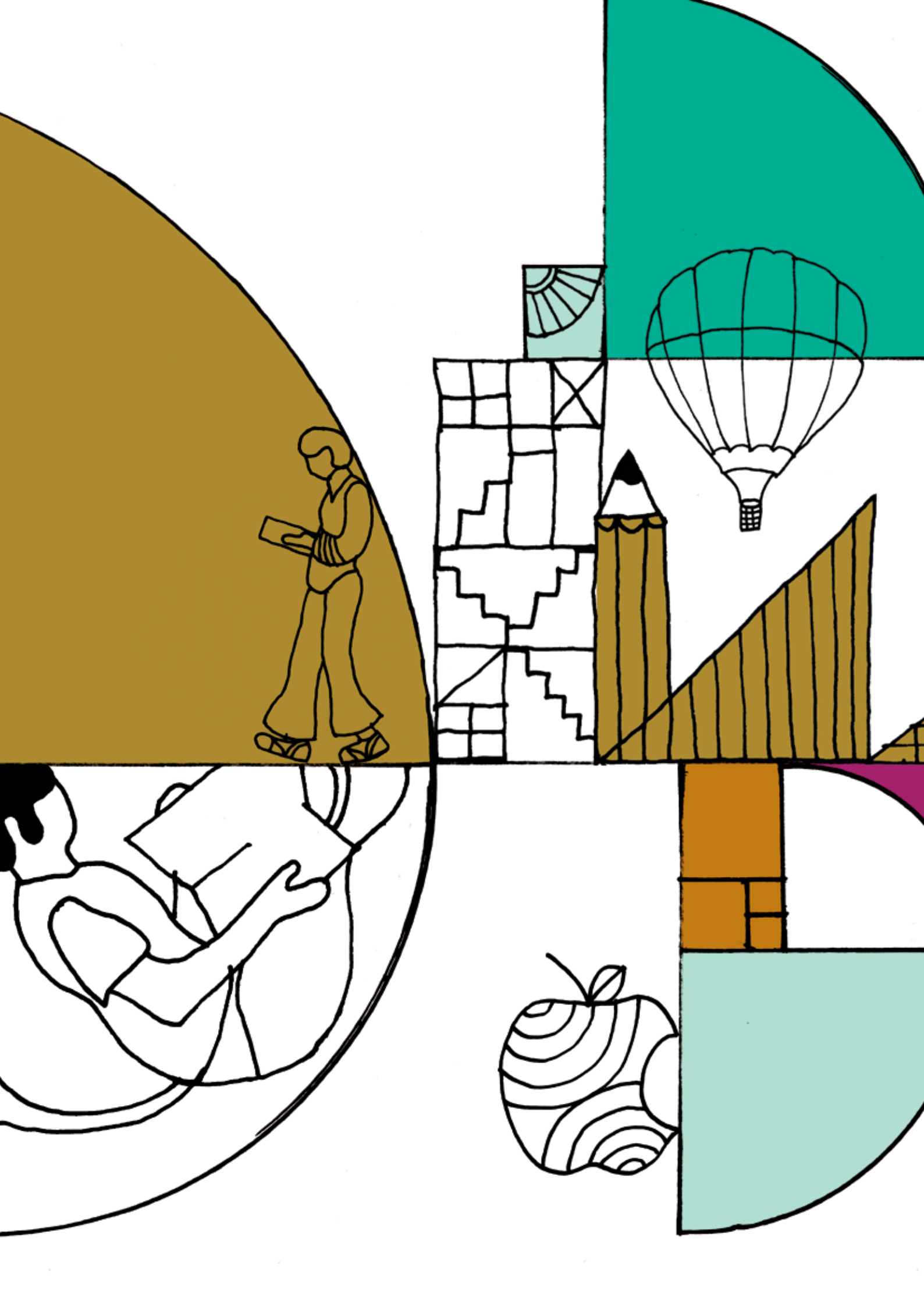
However, lone parents, Travellers and members of other ethnic minority groups, younger people with a disability, homeless people, men and the unemployed are not being as successfully recruited.[82] This trend validates that there is a tendency to recruit groups to community education who are traditional client groups such as women and older people rather than focusing on the ones that are less easy to engage. The results raise the question: to what level would we like to see representation of different priority target groups amongst learners?

In Chapter Five we will explore how community education is supported and managed. This exploration may illuminate why traditional groups are still over-represented in community education.

However, community education's stated role in providing community education to marginalised individuals is borne out by the research. In future chapters we will explore the learning experiences of the learners, the outcomes they experience and the contribution of community education to achieving equality for these groups of learners.

82 The survey did not ask about offending or substance misuse so we cannot conclude anything about representation of these groups in the sample.





4 WHAT IS COMMUNITY EDUCATION ABOUT?

We take a very broad view of what constitutes community education, and not all of them are in terms of people coming in to sit in a room with other people to complete 'classes' as such. In our view, much of the community development work we do has an educational element to it, and the lines are quite blurred between the two (case study provider #10).

INTRODUCTION

This chapter sets out a theoretical framework for community education, the various models of community education, associated methodologies and types of tutor/learner relationships. It then presents relevant research results to ascertain what approaches are employed in the Irish context.

The main findings from this chapter are:

- DES funded community education in Ireland is defined by the shared characteristics of all types of community education models. All types of community education involve local people engaging in informal, collaborative learning that they set the priorities for.
- The models of community education most strongly evidenced in the DES funded community education reflect that it is about bringing learning to people in their local areas as a response to the area's needs. It is less about, as described in an action model, learners engaging in local or social action to address structural disadvantage. However, qualitative data does emphasise that community education should engage disadvantaged learners. The latter characteristic is an element of action models of community education.
- The qualitative data shows that for the majority of case study providers, community education is part of a co-ordinated community development response to the needs of their local areas.
- However, there is some evidence of learners being engaged in learning for action as 51% indicated their tutor had helped them to plan for and address problems in their local community.
- The qualitative data shows that learners are experiencing tutor relationships characterized by empathy, respect, encouragement and equality which in turn model those qualities for learners. They then enact those qualities in their relationships with others.
- Significant resources go into choosing community education tutors and the process of tutoring itself.

BACKGROUND

Community education has a vibrant and dynamic history in Ireland, which is beyond the scope of this review to describe.[83] The focus of this section is to delineate different theoretical approaches to community education and look at some of the documented approaches to it in Ireland.

Models of Community Education

There are some shared characteristics for community education regardless of the theoretical approach favoured. A starting definition from Fletcher is useful here: "Community education is a process of commitment to the education and leisure of all ages through local participation in setting priorities, sharing resources and the study of circumstances. Thus, the community and its educational provisions qualify and enhance each other."[84] There is also usually a claim in community education to the use of more non-formal, creative methods, and the creation of a participative ethos in the learning setting. It is generally acknowledged that learning in community education can take place in a variety of local settings.

There then arises debate about what constitutes an appropriate process, tutor attributes, analytical framework, learner target groups and ultimate goals. Fletcher describes this debate as one of a distinction in belief about whether community education is **liberal** and is about 'free' people becoming 'freer' or whether it is **liberating** and is about people living in bondage or with discrimination being set free.[85]

Useful to this review is Lovett et al.'s analysis of the four models of community education summarised into the table below.

80 For this history see AONTAS. (2004). *Community Education 2004*. AONTAS: Dublin.

84 Fletcher, C. (1980). "The Theory and Practice of Community Education and its Relation to Adult Education." In Thompson, J. (Ed). *Adult Education for a Change*. Hutchinson and Co.: UK. 71.

85 Ibid.

Table 4.1 Models of Community Education[86]

Model	Description
Community organisation/ education	Liberal model – it brings education to the people in their own surroundings on their own terms. Content could be purely for individual development such as vocational training, outreach from a third level institution or larger adult education centre. Tutor is organiser. For any community member.
Community development/ education	Liberal/ reform model – local affairs work closely with local groups to improve local problems. Where opportunity arises educator provides more systematic learning arising from community needs and/or is a resource to community. Learners/educators educate service providers to local area about community needs and wants. For any community member.
Community action/ education	Educational process from Freire for local change – community action as educational process. Radical political education to see how broader societal arrangements impact on the local with some instrumental education. Educators link personal to political. Focus on local solutions as opposed to broader social change. For working class community members.
Social action/ education	Working class education. Structured education provision, which strengthens the working class to take on a broader social change agenda, i.e. political economy. Educators act in solidarity with community.

Martin adds to these models the radical feminist model of community education, which is most closely aligned to the social action/ education model, but targets women and provides gender analysis education.[87] Martin also proposes that specific models could be created for other target groups such as members of ethnic minority communities.

Of note is that the concept of community development in the model named above emerged from the UK tradition and sees community development as a process for "co-ordinating all the relevant social, educational and welfare resources and linking them more effectively to local needs and interests – as a total learning network with adult education helping to improve communication and understanding between all those responsible

86 Lovett, T. et al. (2003). "Community Education and Community Action." In Jarvis, P. and C. Griffin. (Eds.). *Adult and Continuing Education*: Major Themes in Education VII. Routledge: UK. These models are derived from the UK tradition of community education but are useful for comparison to the Irish context.

87 Martin, I. (1993). "Community Education: towards a Theoretical Analysis." In Edwards, R. et al. (eds.). *Adult Learners Education and Training*. Routledge: UK.

for and involved in, the search for solutions to local community problems."[88] It is about creating co-operation as opposed to critical/ collective action. Thus, this concept of community development differs to the Irish tradition, which includes the notion of better results and participation for communities as a result of co-operation between local people and resources, but also includes a political dimension where they act to address structural inequality.[89] Thought about in this way, community development in Ireland is consistent with the community action model named above.

Community education is education for community development and may form a part of the work of a community development organisaton as part of the broader actions staff/ volunteers engage in to provide co-ordination between services in a local area, involve local people in planning and empower them to collectively act to address social exclusion. Community development is the "organised action" on foot of the critical analysis fostered in community education.[90] In reality, a variety of community educational opportunities can be provided by community development organisations incorporating some, all or one of the models set out in Table 4.1 as long as they respond to locally identified needs. Learners may also be engaged in a course focused on learning skills seemingly unrelated to critical analysis of local or broader inequality, but these skills might be integrated into the learning opportunity as well.

Community Education in Ireland

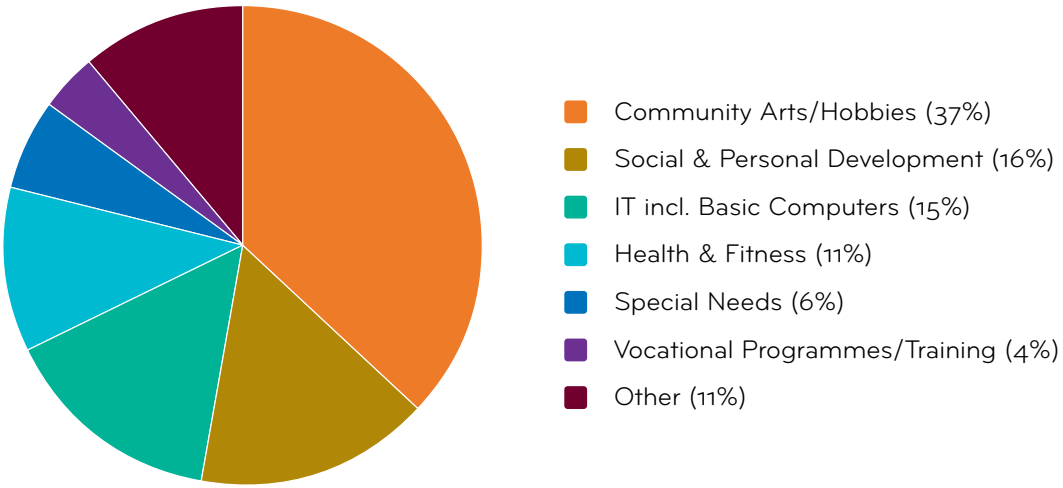
From the 2009 DES returns for ALCES funded community education we know that learners are engaging in the following types of courses presented in the figure over leaf.

88 Lovett, T. et al. (2003). "Community Education and Community Action." In Jarvis, P. and C. Griffin. (Eds.). *Adult and Continuing Education: Major Themes in Education VII*. Routledge: UK. 220

89 see, for instance Motherway, B. (2006). *The Role of Community Development in Tackling Poverty in Ireland: a Literature Review*. Combat Poverty Agency. Dublin.

90 Government of Ireland. (2000). *Learning for Life: the White Paper on Adult Education*. Government Stationary Office: Dublin.

***Figure 4.1 Percentage Course Type ALCES Funded Community Education*[91]**



As can be seen the bulk of learning is in arts and hobby courses. Some of the models outlined in the last section are promoted in the Irish context. The *White Paper on Adult Education*[92] highlighted three models of community education provision. One was the community organisation model, which the paper described, "as an extension of the service provided by second and third-level education institutions into the wider community."[93]

However, the second approach described and adopted in the Green paper set out community education "as a process of communal education towards empowerment, both at an individual and a collective level... it is as an interactive, challenging process, not only in terms of its content but also in terms of its methodologies and decision making processes."[94] This approach is consistent with the community action model described above.

91 These numbers do not include City of Cork VEC.

92 Government of Ireland. (2000). *Learning for Life: the White Paper on Adult Education*. Government Stationary Office: Dublin.

93 Ibid. 110.

94 Ibid. 110.

4 WHAT IS COMMUNITY EDUCATION ABOUT?

The White Paper set out a number of descriptive indicators of the process of community education used in the sector including:

- The way in which community education providers have grown out of the communities they are located in, rather than imposed, usually by the efforts of community activists.
- The lived experience of the learner as the starting point in learning.
- Ensuring that learners are partners in the learning process defining needs and setting content.
- Involving learners in critical reflection and structural analysis so that they can influence the society and community they live in, including groups of learners taking collective action.

The feminist model of women's community education was the third approach highlighted in the White Paper and acknowledged as a driving force for the sector in Ireland. This model is consistent with a social action model as it focuses on local and national action towards equality for women in Ireland and integrates gender analysis training.[95] The White Paper acknowledges how community education in Ireland grew out of small community-based women's groups responding to women's social exclusion through the provision of learning opportunities.

This model of community education is described in the *Women's Community Education Quality Assurance Framework*, a benchmarking process for women's community education groups.[96] This process guides the work of women's community education groups not just in the provision of learning opportunities for women, but also in the work they do to lobby for social change, develop leadership in women and their networking with other groups to collectively address women's inequality. This framework shows that, in order for a women's community education group to implement a social action model of community education they need to be engaged in other activities aside from education provision. They must incorporate a gender analysis and a community development approach consistent with the Irish tradition.

95 See AONTAS. (2009). *Flower Power: a Guidebook for Best Practice in Women's Community Education.* AONTAS: Dublin which contains a quality assurance framework for the practice of WCE as described from WCE groups themselves and states that the ultimate goal of WCE is the achievement of equality for women by groups working at both national and local levels.

96 Ibid.

4 WHAT IS COMMUNITY EDUCATION ABOUT?

AONTAS co-ordinates a national network of community education groups called the Community Education Network. This network developed a shared definition of community education:

> "Community education is a process of personal and community transformation, empowerment, challenge, social change and collective responsiveness. It is community-led reflecting and valuing the lived experiences of individuals and their community. Through its ethos and holistic approach community education builds the capacity of groups to engage in developing a teaching and learning process that is creative, participative and needs-based. Community education is grounded on principles of justice, equality and inclusiveness. It differs from general adult education provision due to its political and radical focus."

This definition is consistent with the action-focused models set out above. However, it is not clear at what level the social change and action is meant to take place.

There would seem to be a documented commitment to community education in Ireland that sits within the community/ social action models. However, in a study on community education in County Donegal, 100% of providers worked for individual and collective empowerment, which is aligned to the community development model above, but only 46% of those providers stated that they implemented a political dimension or action component to the work.[97]

Galligan contends that the former process prioritises community education as a social programme that responds to a need to build social networks in the community that will combat isolation. The latter emphasises social change as a programme goal. The lack of attention to structural change in the social programme approach is one that is increasing in prevalence as noted by Connolly.[98]

The County Donegal study noted that, "In the wider community education sector [in Ireland], this radical agenda may sometimes get lost within a policy agenda that is seeking social inclusion by using community education as an access route to the labour force."[99]

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97 Galligan. C. (2008). *Community Education and Social Change: qualitative Research Exploring the Nature of Community Education in Donegal.* County Donegal VEC: Ireland.

98 Connolly, Brid. (2003). "Community Education: listening to the Voices." *The Adult Learner.* 2003.

99 Ibid. 25.

Grummel agrees that state support of community education requires this narrowing of focus to assisting vulnerable groups to access Irish society, instead of fostering the capacity of these groups to enable learners to critique and revision their world.

The Donegal study did find some consensus from providers about the need for community education to focus on the most excluded learners and that they judged their work on the basis of being able to reach and engage individuals from those target groups.

Approaches to Teaching/Facilitation

The Donegal study identified three teaching facilitation approaches in community education in Ireland:

- Traditional teacher-participant approach with an emphasis on being social, friendly and supportive. The tutor/ facilitator imparts information to the group as opposed to drawing it out from the learners.
- Facilitative approach emphasising personal outcomes, social analysis and critical awareness. The tutor/ facilitator draws out the experience of the group to learn from and apply to the course content. The focus is on the empowerment of the individual.
- Group-based action learning where content is set by the participants – role of facilitator and learner can be exchanged amongst group. The end product is organised action for local or social change.

A key aspect of the process of community education is that the learner group is central to the establishment of an atmosphere where learning can take place, "learning is not just an individual acquisition of knowledge... groups are integral to the notion of community education and group processes underpin the vitality of the area."[100] Groups create, "their own knowledge and value system"[101] to use as a resource for their learning.

The role of the facilitator/tutor is asserted as integral to the success of community education as they initiate and facilitate the process described.

100 Connolly, Brid. (2003). "Community Education: listening to the Voices." *The Adult Learner.* 2003: 12.

101 Ibid: 12.

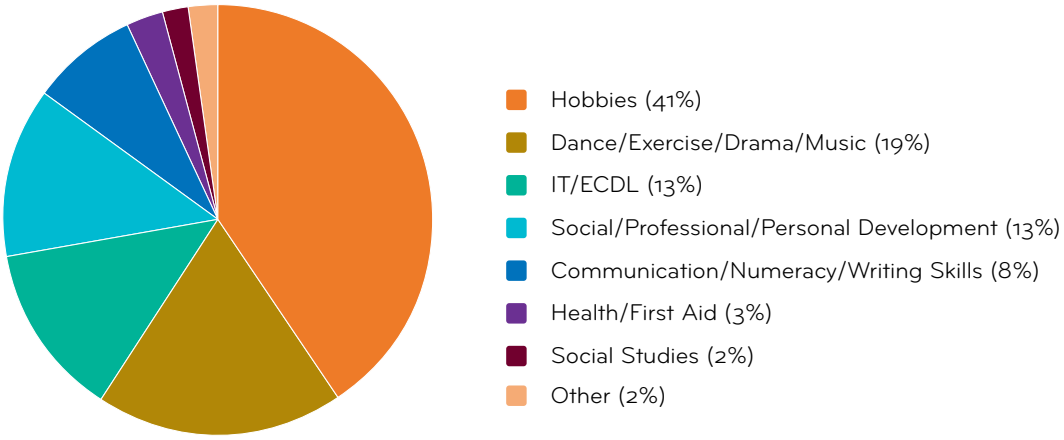
RELEVANT RESULTS

This section presents quantitative results from the learner's survey about the approach to community education they experienced and the tutor-learner relationship they were engaged in. Where relevant, responses from the VEC personnel survey are presented for comparison. Qualitative feedback relating to the former and the latter are presented to illuminate the quantitative results.

Community Education Approach

The first set of results relating to the community education approach experienced is the type of courses that learners were currently involved in. They are set out in the figure below.

Figure 4.2 Percentage Type of Course Learner's Survey



The figure shows that the bulk of learning in community education was hobby learning (41%) including such topics as art, photography, gardening or flower arranging. The second most frequent type of course was physical movement, drama and music learning (19%). IT/ECDL and social/professional and personal development learning (13%) were the third most frequent type of courses learners were engaged in. These figures are broadly similar to the 2009 breakdown at national level although an accurate comparison is not possible given that the course categories for reporting changed in 2009 and the old categories were used in the learner's survey.

Learners were asked to complete a 45-item question where they selected adjectives that described their experience of community education. These adjectives were clustered into categories representing the four models of community education outlined in the background to this chapter. Each model was given a score based on how many learners had experienced it. The results of that analysis are set out in the table below.

Table 4.2 Models of Community Education Experienced by Learners

Model	Score (Mean)	Maximum No. Points
Community Organisation – Liberal	3.03	6
Community Development – Liberal/ Reform	1.49	5
Community Action – Freirean Education for Local Change	1.91	9
Social Action – Working Class Education	1.42	9

The table shows that the models most frequently experienced by learners are the community organization and community development models. The most popular adjectives chosen by learners were 'friendly' (78%), 'interesting' (71%), 'useful' (64%) and 'social' (62%). Of the positive adjectives the ones least selected by learners were 'political economy' (4%), 'class analysis' (8%), 'changes community (12%), and 'action' (14%).

Qualitative Analysis

In this section consideration is given to the models of community education interviewees and case study providers described. Also considered is the ethos and work of case study providers.

Models of community education

Strategic and case study provider interviews were analysed in order to see if their descriptions fit into the models from Martin set out above. Descriptions did not generally fit neatly into a single model, but were usually hybrids of two and sometimes three. For instance, four of the interviewees described community education as a hybrid between the community organisation and community development model. The quote below illustrates this hybrid:

> "[The purpose] is to provide as wide and varied educational opportunities in communities irrespective of the educational levels those people have. There is a focus on people who left school at upper secondary. [It is] aimed at addressing deficits that people would have. Would initially focus on building confidence and capacity to engage with further education opportunities.

> [At the moment] there is a changing perspective in community education and changing demands in light of the current economic context. [There is] a growing focus on providing for people who are newly unemployed. [Its about] community development, community enhancement, social inclusion. [It's a] very wide parish in terms of responding to demand. [We] will continue to focus on people with upper secondary or less, quite a few newly unemployed are suffering from those educational deficits anyway" (strategic interviewee #4).

In this quote we can see elements of the community organisation model in that it is about bringing education to local communities for everyone. We can also see elements of the community development model where the interviewee references community development, enhancement and social inclusion.

Strategic interviewees were more likely than case study providers to mention elements of community education, which fit into the community organisation model. In fact, most of them described elements of that model in their accounts. As one interviewee described, "The role of community education is to provide local, accessible part-time educational programmes but it is also a starting point for a lot of people because… it is representative of the VEC in one way and the types of programmes that the VEC would have and could have to offer" (strategic interviewee #8).

In this quote community education is an extension of the VEC services brought to people in their localities, which is a key element of the community organisation model.

Case study providers were most likely to describe their provision in a way that sits within the community development model of community education. They described their programmes as responding to learners' needs and local issues. Part of the criteria for case studies was that they would have evolved as a community response so their descriptions of community education fit with their histories. The quote below demonstrates this model of community education for case study providers:

> "The basis of everything that we do is that we go out and talk to people and we ask them what are the needs in the local area. It's a response to some of the identified needs. Its also a response to a social need… Our most recent survey would have been 2008… [It] focused on needs of people who have newly moved into the area… needs somewhere to meet people… Our own experience would be that really it's a valid, safe way for people to come

> forward to get involved in something, and the challenge within it is to move people towards a position of confidence that they can make choices that work in what they want to do" (case study provider #1).

In this quote community education is a local response to local issues and more instrumental or structured learning is supplied to address those issues. One substantive difference between Lovett's community development model of community education is that most interviewees and providers who described elements of this model made the proviso that the focus of community education was on the most disadvantaged as opposed to everyone in the community.

Only one of the strategic interviewees and two of the case study providers described elements of community education that fit into the community action model, because they described how community education could facilitate groups of learners to engage collectively in local social actions. Out of all the qualitative data only two strategic interviewees described elements of community education that fit within the social action model. As one interviewee said:

> "[Community education] is a radical form of education and rather than say it does a, b and c... it aspires sometimes doing it better than others. It can make a significant contribution to individuals' lives but also to the lives of communities. I think it is rooted in a commitment to social change and I think it, at its best, it works best in communities, which are really struggling with inequality and poverty. The purpose of it is: to one [purpose] is the individual; and one [purpose] is the community. It is about transforming individuals and communities and that is an integrated purpose, because it seeks to create social change and that means a whole element of sowing the seeds of critical analysis in every individual who undertakes some form of education or training in a community education context. It's to change the world... to eradicate poverty. That's what we say all of the time all of our work is based on that belief and that community education is the ideal form of education to do that" (strategic interviewee #3).

In this quote we see elements of both the community action model in that it is seen as something that can change local communities, but is also perceived as something that is about broad social change or 'to change the world'.

Two of the strategic interviewees expressed doubt that community education is being provided in the way described in the White Paper that is consistent with the community action model. Instead, they asserted that community education had become, "functional adult education, but based in community groups" or education that is aligned to Martin's community organisation model. This interviewee presents her perception of the current state of affairs for community education:

> "Yes, in theory [community education is distinct] it's probably still distinct in its management structure and origins. There are beacons, examples of community education that are very distinctive. I am talking more about very strongly managed community centres. In every movement there's a pull to the centre where the funding is. People lose the energy to struggle... that's not to say that new community education won't start on the margins. It's a cycle it keeps moving in and out (strategic interviewee #1)."

The ethos and work of case study providers

Criteria for case studies were that they had to have evolved as a result of local people responding to local need, they had to self-identify as a community education provider and they had to satisfy one of the target group criteria stated in the methodology section. Five of the organisations were community development groups or situated in a community development group. Two were family resource centres, organisations that are meant to work from a community development approach. Four described themselves as community education centres working to the needs of their local area.

Nine of the providers did not just engage in community education. Some were involved in structured community development work while others provided other services to their communities or were involved in co-ordinating local events such as volunteer visiting services, a local boat race, family support, childcare provision and youth work.

All of the providers described themselves as responding to social exclusion issues in their local areas. Some indicated that they were involved in policy work to address structural inequality in their communities.

For most of the case study providers community education was a part of a broader, structured response to local needs. One case study provider described the link between the work of the whole organisation and community education:

> "[Community education] is about access into community life… it is an access point to avail of all the services that we provide. I think its all about addressing isolation and community involvement and its very, at a very basic level… We do attempt to progress people into FETAC courses… at a very basic level that's how I would see it… a foundation of what we do" (case study provider #6)."

Analysis

The quantitative and qualitative data in this section show that there is a currency for the community organisation model of community education with some use of the community development approach. Learners were much less likely to have experienced the community action or social action approaches and interviewees were not likely to describe either of the action approaches when asked what community education was about. The main type of learning learners were engaged in was hobby courses.

The case study providers were more likely to describe implementing a community development model of community education where provision of learning opportunities was part of an overall structured, co-ordinated response to the needs of local areas and included other activities or services.

Tutor-Learner Relationship

Learners and VEC personnel were asked to read a series of statements about tutors in community education and indicate their level of agreement to them. For learners these statements were also clustered into categories representing the three tutor approaches described by Galligan. The scores for each approach are set out in the table below.

Table 4.3 Tutor Approach Experienced by Learners

Approach	Score (Mean)	Maximum No Points
Traditional Teacher-Participant Approach	3.89	5
Facilitative Approach	3.8	5
Group-Based Action Approach	3.9	5

The table shows that all three types of tutor approach are being employed in community education, with no particular approach emphasised over the others. We can see how the VEC personnel and learners answered the tutor statements in more detail in Figures 4.3 and 4.4.

For learners, the vast majority (98%) of participants agreed or agreed strongly that the tutors/facilitators were friendly. The vast majority (98%) of participants also agreed or agreed strongly that the tutors/facilitators were supportive in the learning and really wanted them to do well in the course. A large majority of the participants agreed or agreed strongly that tutors/facilitators were understanding. Those with post-secondary education were less likely to agree or agree strongly with this statement [$\chi 2(2)= 6.49$, $p < .05$].

When the VEC personnel were asked which of the aspects of tutoring should be carried out by tutors in community education they more most likely to agree or strongly agree to the same three features of the relationship as those that learners named about their experience.

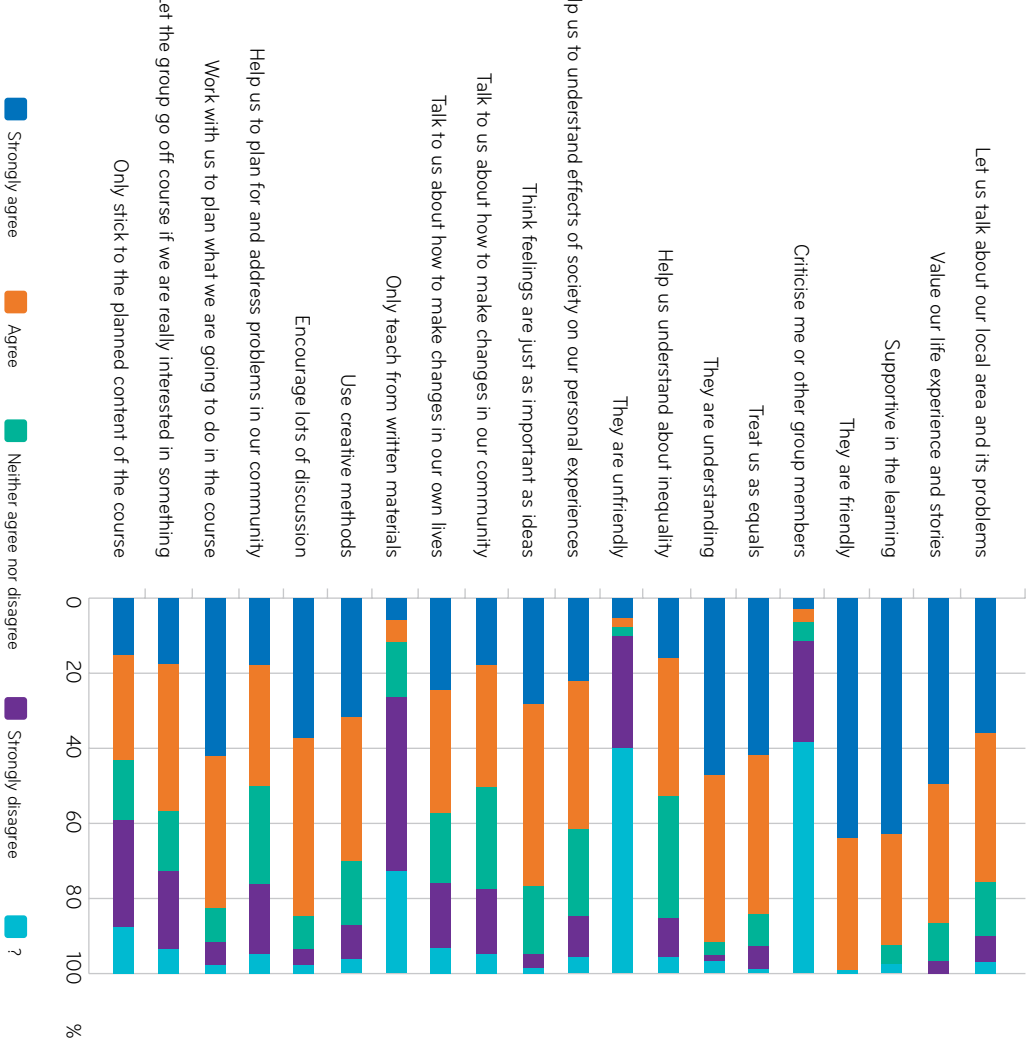
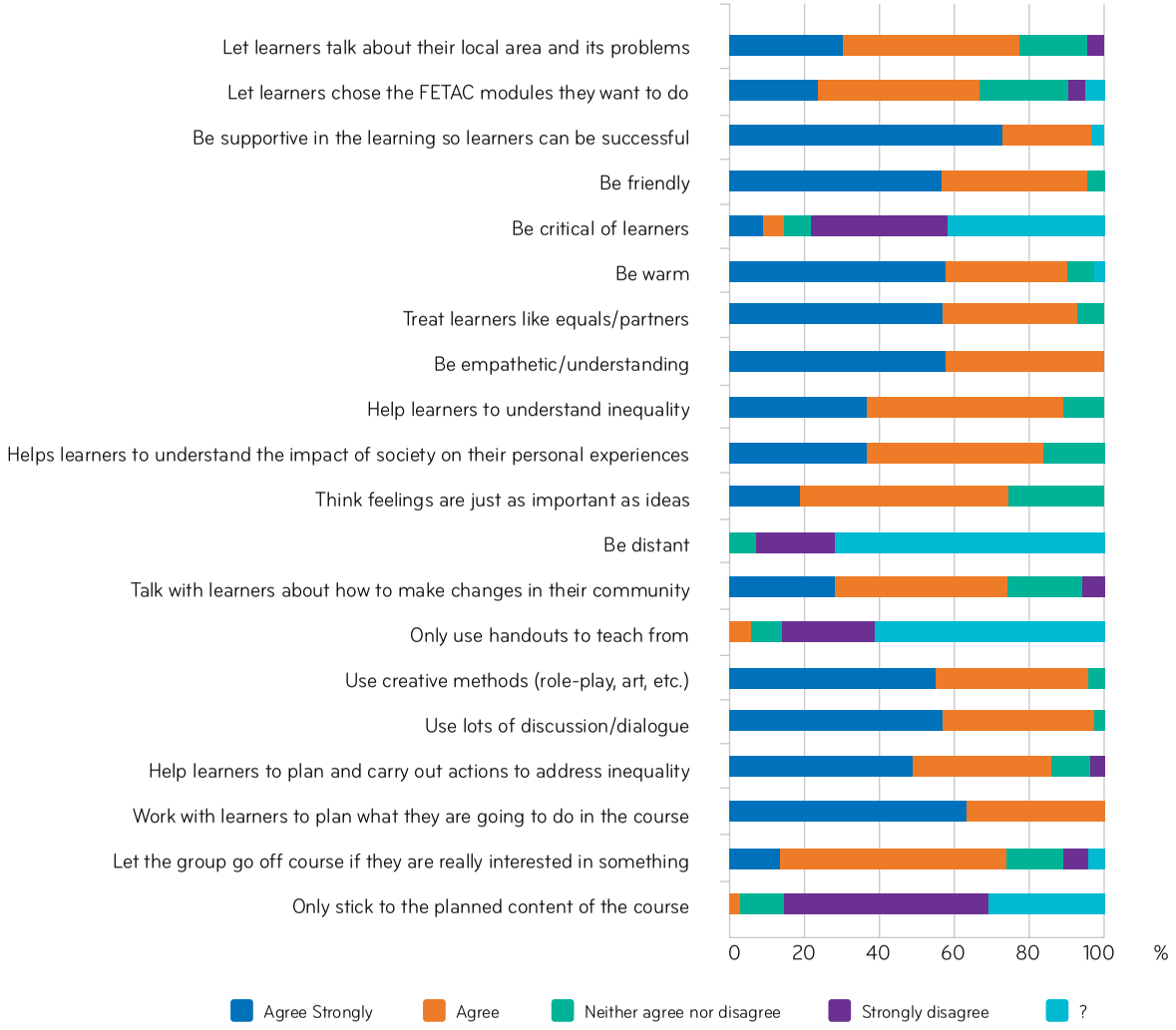


Figure 4.3 Percentage Level of Agreement to Tutor Statements Learner's Survey

Figure 4.4 Percentage Level of Agreement Tutor Statements VEC Personnel



Learners were least likely to agree with the following positive statements: "they talk to us about how to make changes in our community" (41%); "they only stick to the planned content of the course" (42%), and "they help us to plan for and address problems in our community" (51%).

VEC personnel were least likely to agree with the statements: "lets learners choose the FETAC modules they want to do" (66%); "let the group go off course if they are really interested in something" (73%), and "thinks feelings are just as important as ideas" (73%).

Learners taking part in the survey were asked to indicate which aspect of community education assisted them to make positive changes in relation to each outcome area assessed. When those results are aggregated the top two ranked aspects of community education that assist positive changes are the overall atmosphere in the group (N=687) and the way the tutor/ facilitator treated people taking part in the course (N=486).

Qualitative Data

The case study providers and the case study learners all reflected on the nature of the tutor- learner relationship and the learning experience. Themes emerging from this data are set out below.

Respect

This facet of the tutor-learner relationship came up consistently throughout the interviews with the case study providers and the learners. The tutor's role modeling of respect was also described by some learners as helpful to their achievement of other learning outcomes. As one learner said the respect she received from her tutor and that was cultivated amongst learners meant that, "you look a bit differently at how you treat others yourself" (past learner #1).

Equality

Again this facet was named time and time again by case study providers as essential to the tutor-learner relationship, "I would like to see a relationship of equals so that the tutor learns from the students as the well as the students learning from the tutor" (case study provider #6).

Some of the learners also picked up on this aspect and how it facilitates learning, "the tutors treat you equal to themselves [there is] no difference between student and tutor, it gives you more confidence... they make education interesting" (present learner #9). Another learner reported, "[we were] definitely treated as equals" (past learner #5).

Encouragement

This facet of the relationship emerged most strongly in the interviews with learners. They almost always mentioned how supportive and encouraging or helpful their tutors had been in the learning, "they give you good feedback if you have something, after [the course] they came to me to say I totally enjoyed working with you, they build your confidence, they make you aware of the skills you have and they praise" (present learner #4).

Many learners reported situations where tutors had gone beyond the 'call of duty' to facilitate their learning such as being available for after hours assistance, or delivering course notes to someone's house.

One learner spoke about how the tutor can facilitate positive personal development changes through encouragement, "the tutors help you out, makes you feel better, know more about what you want, make you feel good about yourself" (present learner #2).

Providers tended to describe this facet of the relationship as empowerment and that the role of the tutor was to encourage learners to find solutions for themselves.

Empathy

Every case study provider spoke about the importance of tutors having a sympathetic understanding the context of learners' lives or an ability to empathise. Many named this facet as important because of the potential for learners to have experienced discrimination or educational disadvantage:

> "It's that respect, support and recognizing the background that people come in here from as trainees. They may react to things that people from other backgrounds don't so they have to take... they're not just teaching the skill. The person might need healing in some way so they've got to be careful about how they approach things, trying to be positive rather than negative. Without a connection with the person there's nothing going to happen... particularly with people, we have people with very severe histories" (case study provider #8).

Some learners described their experience of being on the receiving end of empathy by their tutors, "Its nice to know that the tutor cares [you are] a part of their family [they are] interested to know how you are getting on [you] need to have that sometimes you wouldn't have a clue" (past learner #2).

Experiential learning

Again, all the case study providers remarked on the importance of the lived experience of the learner as the starting point, "[It is] an adult to adult relationship and we impress upon the tutors that we are valuing people's existing previous experience and knowledge, life skills and their culture" (case study provider #11).

Getting the tutor right is crucial

Many of the providers spoke about how the learning experience rises and falls with the tutor and that they went to great lengths to get appropriate tutors, including shadowing or observing new tutors, only taking tutors from the local area, or waiting significant lengths of time for a tutor to become available. Factors that they took into account when selecting the tutor included not just competence to facilitate course content, but also matching the tutor to the group in terms of background or disposition. Analysis of case study providers' descriptions of the tutor-learner relationship in community education allows us to build a picture of the skills and qualities of a community education tutor, set out in the table below.

Table 4.4 Skills and Qualities of Community Education Tutor

Skills	Qualities
Knowledge of course content	Nice
Knowledge of adult education philosophy	Open
Empathetic	Friendly
Gender/social analysis	Non-judgemental – unconditional positive regard
Critical reflection	Respectful
Can foster collaborative, participatory learning environment	Humourous
	Welcoming
Solution-focused approach	
Can facilitate experiential learning	
Listening skills	

The analysis above shows that providers tended to describe a tutor relationship that encompassed all three of the types set out by Galligan. One case study provider summarises the key criteria for a community education tutor, "[they] need to understand that a community education programme is there as a community education response and a community service and is not adult education provision for a profit, [they need] a

respect for learning for learnings own sake... attitudinally they have to be reflective in their own practice and above all they have to be open" (case study provider #1).

The collaborative learning environment

The qualitative data from the case studies was replete with descriptions of what this environment was like for learners, including that it was to be positive, friendly, warm and welcoming. It was also to be a resource to learners in the way set out by Connolly above. The following quote illustrates how one provider described the collaborative learning environment in their centre:

> "What I used to explain, a way of looking at what we do, we're living in a village,... there are a range of people in the community, but everyone must have a place of right entitled to a function or a place in this community... That's all we ask of them because of this idea of the village... We're all connected. The challenge – so you can't ignore people – so that challenge is to find something that they can do. So I say if you are good at whistling well whistle while we work and that'll do. You can also use this to talk to people who are coming in here – this is what we require... a willingness to find something to do that contributes in some way" (case study provider #8).

Some of the case study learners highlighted how the tutor had established the collaborative learning environment so valued by the providers. This learner expresses how observing the tutor helped him when he became a volunteer tutor for his community education provider, "'to see how the tutor handled groups of people coming together for the first time, moulded them into a working group [I] picked up skills needed for my tutoring... tutor gave the impression that they were all in the same boat and will all get over the line together" (past learner 9).

Analysis

The data presented about the tutor approach in community education illustrates the central emphasis on a positive learning experience and tutor-learner relationship in community education. This feature is illustrated by the fact that very few learners agreed with the negative tutor statements. It is also illustrated by the significant resources that are devoted to sourcing tutors for groups that meet the criteria elaborated in the qualitative data. It is also borne out in learners' descriptions of the positive impacts their tutors had on them and the energy tutors devoted to them.

All three tutor approaches are employed in community education. However, in the frequencies learners were less likely to agree with statements that were linked to the tutor working with them to talk about their local area and make plans to address local problems.

There is strong evidence to suggest that most community education learners experience a collaborative learning environment where they are involved in developing course content, are treated as equals and their experience is valued. It is of note that some personnel were less likely to agree with statements that supported the development of a collaborative learning environment such as letting learners choose FETAC modules, thinking feelings were as important as ideas and letting the group go off course if they were interested in something.

DISCUSSION

It is clear from the data that the characteristics shared by all the models of community education are evident in the DES funded community education. Learning is about local people in a non-formal environment, participating in a course where they set the learning priorities, they share and learn from their life experience and from that engage in collaborative learning.

We also see that as per the characteristics of the community education sector described in White Paper there is strong evidence to suggest that the lived experience of learners is the starting point and that there is some focus in the tutor approach to learners analysing the effects of society on their experiences.

The results show that the approaches favoured in community education are the community organisation and community development models. In these models education is brought to the community in their local area and can emerge as a response to local needs, the latter of which is part of a community development approach. Many case study providers described implementing a community development model of community education as part of a co-ordinated response to local needs involving other services and actions.

However, the action models of community education articulated in the White Paper are less in evidence for learners, providers and VEC personnel.

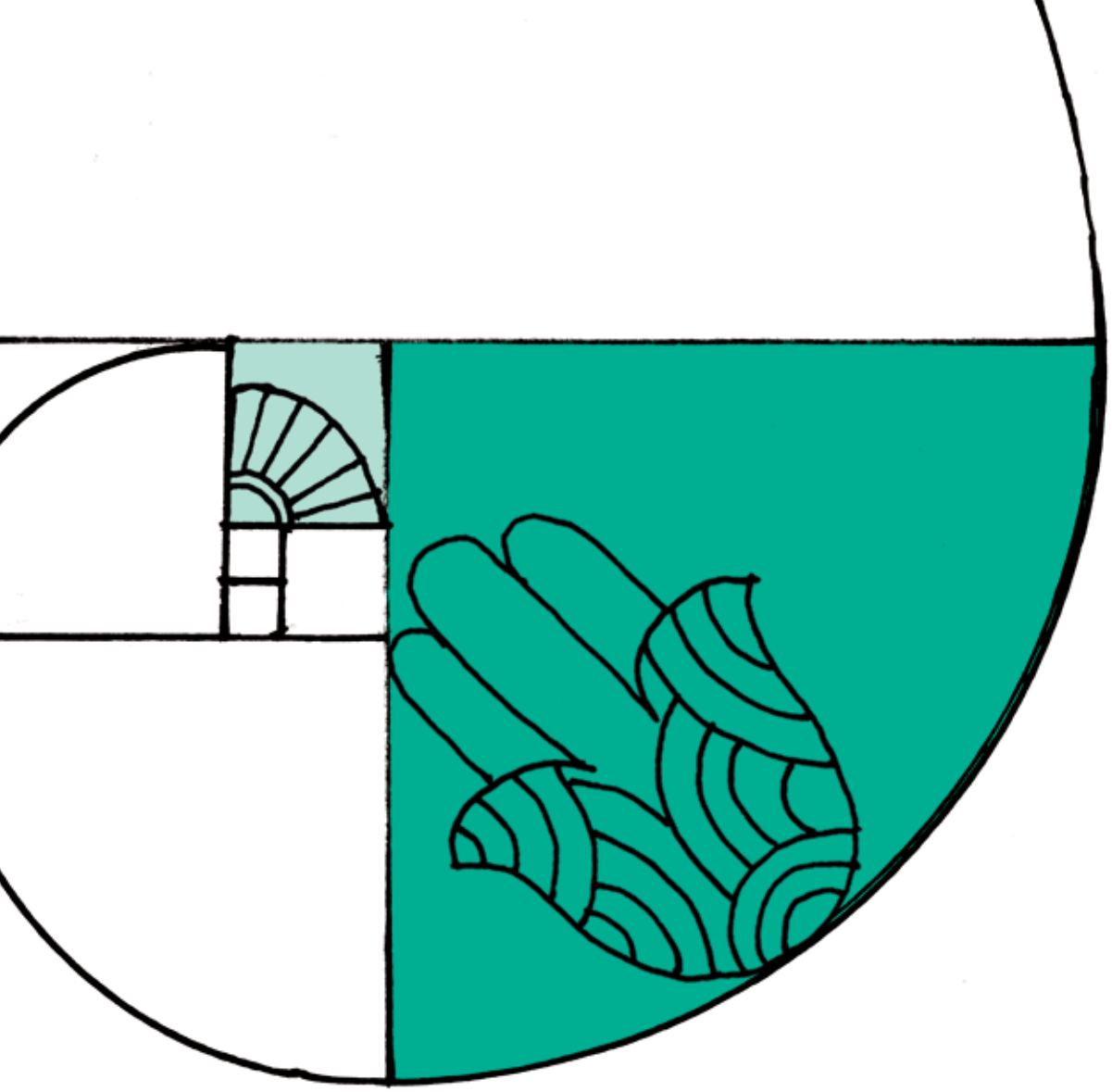
Some evidence of the action models was illustrated through the tutor statements when some of the learners indicated that their tutors had helped them to plan for and address problems in their community (51%) or talked to them about how to make changes in their community (41%).

These finding show the impact of trends set out in Galligan's research, which found that all providers were engaged in education for individual and collective empowerment to address social isolation but were less likely to be involved in programmes for social change.

We can also see that all three tutor approaches are being employed in community education. However, those models are not mutually exclusive. For instance, the results show that tutors are engaging in warm, friendly relationships with learners, consistent with the traditional tutor approach, but we could assume that those elements of the relationship would need to be consistent across all approaches.

What is clear is that the tutor is central to a successful community education experience and that significant thought and resources go into that area of provision. Tutors engage learners in relationships of respect, equality, empathy and encouragement, which model those qualities for learners. They then enact those elements in relationships they engage in outside the learning environment.

Chapters Seven, Eight and Nine will consider if the models implemented in DES funded community education result in outcomes that achieve the aims for ALCES community education and the Back to Education Initiative Community Strand.



5 HOW IS DES COMMUNITY EDUCATION MANAGED AND SUPPORTED?

At a basic level [community education] its to give women opportunities that they never had around their own education and has a huge impact on how they view education themselves and for their children (case study provider #4).

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the policy and operational context for DES funded community education, including how funding is allocated and managed, how programmes are operated and the types of courses on offer. It also presents data collected for the study about the provision of community education. The former and the latter are compared to see if practice matches policy.

The main findings from this chapter are:

- There is a lack of a consistent approach to the management of community education across the VECs.
- In particular, there is variation in the criteria used to make decisions about resourcing groups. The main criteria employed were that the group identified the need for the course themselves or that they were comprised of members of one of the target groups named in the White Paper. Process-focused criteria (such as employing creative methods or fostering social action) or criteria about educational or income disadvantage were less likely to be used.
- The learner's survey sample shows community education does seem to be targeting disadvantaged individuals for the most part, and this feature would appear to be due to the CEFs knowledge of the communities they serve. Also the majority (81%) did use at least one criterion related to priority target group or educational/ income disadvantage to make decisions about groups to fund.
- However, the continuing over-recruitment of traditional disadvantaged target groups as opposed to more hard-to-reach groups asks us to consider if the lack of a standard approach to management of ALCES community education is an obstacle to the recruitment of the harder-to-reach groups in community education.
- The unique process of community education could be tracked and implemented with a clear policy about community education incorporating a standard approach to its management, clear funding criteria and effective tools to track outcomes. These outcomes measurement tools would need to be simple and easy to use for community education groups on the ground.

- ALCES funded community education learners do not stay in community education for long as the majority had completed less than two courses. This finding could confirm that community education is meeting a stated aim to bridge learners into other types of education and training.
- Word of mouth is the main way ALCES learners find out about community education courses. This strategy may not be the most effective means to engage hard to reach groups.

BACKGROUND

In the White Paper, a number of provisions were made for community education including:

- Appointment of a national team of 35 Community Education Facilitators (CEFs) to promote and support community education across the country. CEFs were to be appointed by the VECs, but were to be based in and work to Local Adult Learning Boards which were envisioned as autonomous sub-committees of the VECs that could make decisions about the deployment of resources for adult and community education in their regions. They were to be made up of representatives of social partners, providers, target group providers, partnerships and libraries.
- Set up of a Community Education Technical Support Unit through the National Adult Learning Council (NALC) that would co-ordinate the work of the CEFs to support the named target group sectors (see below).
- A statement of community education provider sectors for whom CEFs were to provide technical support for provision, namely: community-based women's groups, men's groups, disability groups, Traveller and other ethnic minority groups, older people and community arts groups.
- A statement of the descriptive characteristics of the community education process (see Chapter Four).
- Ten percent of annual funding increase through the Back to Education Initiative to focus on community education – this has come to be known as the BTEI Community Strand.
- A separate budget line for community education to be administered through NALC initially, but eventually allocated through the local adult learning boards.[102]

102 Government of Ireland. (2000). *Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education*. Government Stationary Office: Dublin.

Other than the appointment of CEFs, many of the provisions in the document have yet to be implemented. NALC has not met since 2004 and has been formally disbanded. There are some local adult learning boards in some areas across the country, but not in others and there is no separate budget line for community education.

As previously indicated, there are clear guidelines on the groups and programmes that can be funded under the BTEI Community Strand. There is no standard, unified set of guidelines for ALCES funded community education.

THE CEFs

Since their appointment in 2003, the CEFs have become the primary personnel supporting and promoting DES funded community education. A description of their roles and responsibilities is contained in Appendix B. Currently there are 36 CEFs around the country. While they work to the responsibilities detailed in their job description they can respond to local needs since the White Paper decreed that, a CEF must "demonstrate a deep-rooted knowledge of the communities they serve and a clear understanding and empathy with the philosophy and processes of community education."[103] Therefore, schemes in VECs may differ from one to the next.

Challenges to implementing the role have emerged. Kavanagh found that the role of the CEF is understood differently in each VEC, due to the individual VEC management's understanding of community education and the influence of local civil society.[104] Through her research, CEFs reported that management of many VECs see community education as an extension of the VEC service in to the community, which is not the definition advocated in the White Paper. This divergence on the role of community education has resulted in debates about whether or not CEFs should support the development of groups that come forward for financial assistance and capacity-building or if they should actually become involved in starting up groups. The former approach is seen as consistent with community education as education for collective development whereas the latter is aligned to a service approach.

Many CEFs are not just involved in promoting and supporting community education through the ALCES budget but may also be involved in supporting groups who are in receipt of BTEI

103 Government of Ireland. (2000). *Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education*. Government Stationary Office: Dublin. 115.

104 Kavanagh, M. (2006). *Have the Community Education Facilitators made a Difference to Community Education?* Masters Dissertation for the Department of Adult and Community Education NUI Maynooth: Ireland.

Community Strand funding. More recently, many CEFs would also be involved in processing FETAC portfolios for participants funded through the two programmes.

The CEFs have also lobbied the Department to begin tracking the wider outcomes of community education as they report that the current templates are not adequate.

RELEVANT RESULTS

Each CEF or relevant person was asked to complete a short questionnaire detailing the provision of community education in their VEC area. The results of this survey can add to our understanding of how community education operates in different areas. To enhance this exploration relevant results from the learner's survey are also presented. Qualitative feedback from VEC personnel, case study providers and strategic interviewees provides reflection on the supports, strengths of and challenges for community education.

Community Education in the VECs

Thirty-two VECs provided information about the provision of community education in their area.[105] They detailed how community education is staffed in each of their VECs, which is shown in the table below.

Table 5.1 Profile of Staff Working in Community Education across the VECs

	Full Time		Part Time	
	Male	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**
CEF	5	27	0	3
AEO	12	17	0	0
EO	2	4	0	0
Development Workers	0	0	1	3
Tutors (volunteer)	0	0	2	6
Tutors (paid)	12	74	168	714
Resource workers	0	0	0	5
Administration	0	5	0	16
Total	**31**	**127**	**171**	**747**

105 County Meath did not complete this questionnaire.

The table shows that the VEC community education sector is female dominated and staffed largely by part-time paid tutors. CEFs were also asked how funding from the ALCES budget for community education was managed and this is set out in the table below.

Table 5.2 Management of Funding for Community Education Provision received from ALCE Budget

Personnel	Percent
CEF	56
AEO	25
Other (usually CEO and AEO together)	16
No answer	3
Total	**100**

We can see from the table that in most cases CEFs are responsible for the management of funding for community education in the VECs, but there is variation across the country. The table below presents how funding is distributed to groups.

Table 5.3 Method of Funding Distribution for Community Education Programmes from ALCEs Budget

Method	Percent
Through tutor hours to groups	53
Grants to groups	9
Mix of both	38
Total	**100**

Most funding is distributed through tutor hours to groups. However, again we see that there is variation in method across the country. CEFs were then asked to indicate from a range of criteria, which ones they used to make decisions about groups eligibility for community education funding. Their responses are considered in Table 5.4.

Table 5.4 Percentage Criteria for Funding Community Education Groups

Criteria	Must meet
Need for course must be identified by group themselves	90
Must target one of the groups mentioned in the White Paper	72
Course should have some focus on encouraging community/ social action	59
Course should demonstrate how it will foster learners' self esteem	53
Learners must be educationally disadvantaged	44
Course should employ participatory/ creative methods	28
Group must be located in a disadvantaged area	19
Course should show how learners can connect the personal to the political	16
Course must be non-accredited	13
Course can be accredited but must be at level 5 or below	13
Course should engender class/ gender analysis	0
Group of learners must be unwaged	9

The most often used criteria is that groups must have identified the need for the course themselves (90%), followed by courses needing to target one of the groups mentioned in the White Paper (72%) and that the course should have some focus on encouraging community/ social action (59%). Community education services were less likely to indicate that they used criteria, which were linked with the non-formal and political nature of community education expressed in the White Paper or were related to educational and income disadvantage. However, eighty-one percent of community education services were employing at least one of the criteria related to target group or disadvantage listed above. Generally, services considered criteria in relation to accreditation inapplicable for making decisions about funding.

Again, there is variation in how decisions are made to fund community education groups across the country. Community education services were also asked to detail the types of support that they offered to groups that were funded through the ALCES budget but also the BTEI Community Strand as per their job description from DES.[106] Table 5.5 presents the results.

106 See circular letter 45/02 from the then Department of Education and Science.

Table 5.5 Percentage Supports offered to Groups by Funding Stream

Support	BTEI Community	Community Education
Identifying suitable tutors	66	100
Facilitating partnerships between CE groups and statutory agencies or other providers	34	91
Advice on appropriate curriculum	62	91
Advice on accreditation issues	66	91
Continuing professional development for tutors	47	91
Information on progression opportunities for providers to give to learners	56	91
Free access to VEC rooms	41	88
Organising or supporting jointly organised events	31	88
Information on funding opportunities	41	81
Information on neighbouring activities/resources	41	78
Materials for classes (occasionally)	41	75
Loans of laptops	19	66
Advice on methodology and pedagogy	50	69
Information on policy issues	28	66
Information on service providers groups might need to refer learners to	38	62
Supporting groups' participation in community fora	22	63
Representing community groups on boards of management	13	59
Training for providers (occasional)	31	50
Facilitating access to e-learning	19	44
Facilitating regular learning network meetings	13	44
Information on provision of access to a national website providing information that underpins grant applications	16	34
Other	0	10

From the table we can see that CEFs are mostly involved in working closely with groups funded through the ALCES budget to support their provision. What is notable about these results is that some CEFs are providing some technical support to those groups funded under the BTEI Community Strand.

Community education services were asked to describe, from a closed list, what challenges they faced in their work. The results are considered in the table below.

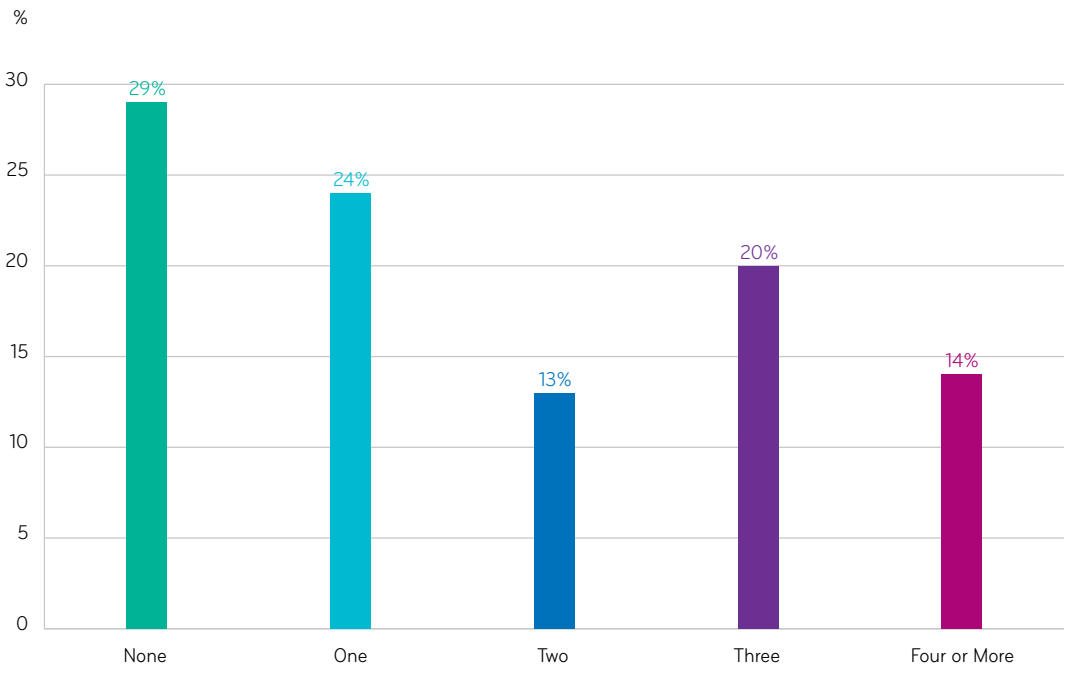
Table 5.6 Main Challenges facing Community Education Services in their Work with Groups

Challenges	("YES") Percentage
Lack of adequate tools/processes to track learner outcomes	59
Getting providers to keep records/record data on learner outcomes	47
Getting providers to submit reports	41
Lack of funding to support provision	41
Community education undervalued in VEC	31
Ensuring quality of tutoring	25
Progression rates low	25
Other	25
Getting groups to collaborate/link up so that progression is easy for learners	22
Lack of agreement to a standard approach to community education across VEC	22
Getting groups to engage in and complete FETAC Quality assurance	16
Providers find it hard to get the minimum numbers of participants needed for a group	13
Certification rates low	9
Completion rates low	3
Attendance rates low	0

The top three challenges identified by CEF were lack of adequate tools to track learner outcomes (58%), getting providers to engage in record keeping about learner outcomes (45%), getting providers to submit reports (41%) and lack of funding to support provision (41%).

The learner's survey of ALCES community education learners results provide us with a small insight into the provision of community education in terms of the number of courses learners had completed. The results are set out in the figure below.

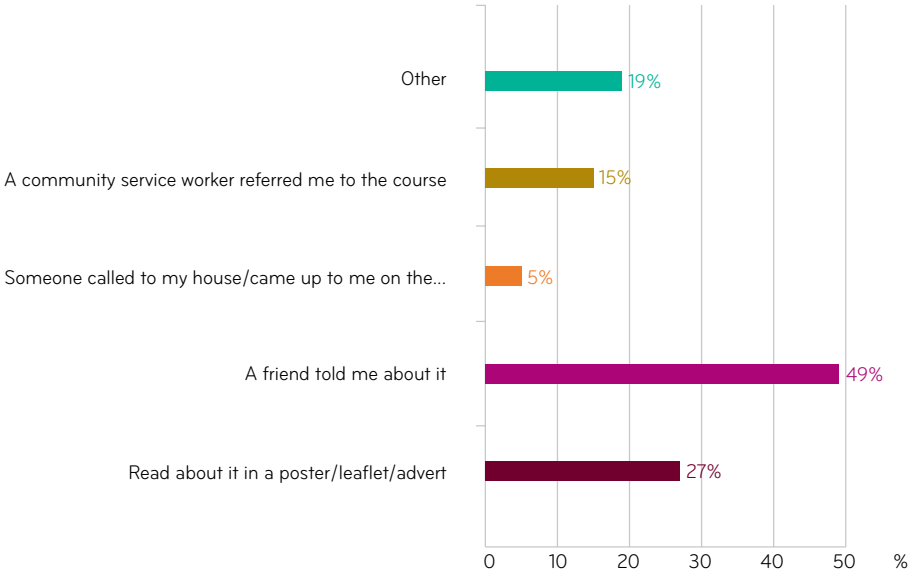
Figure 5.1 Percentage Number of Community Education Classes Completed by Learners



The figure shows that the bulk of learners (66%) had done two or less community education courses. The majority of learners in the survey (84%) stated that they were only currently involved in one course.

Of note to this chapter is how learners find out about community education as shown in Figure 5.2.

Figure 5.2 Percentage how Learners found out about their Current Community Education Provider



This table shows that the main way learners find out about community education is through word of mouth.

Qualitative Data

The interviews held with strategic informants and case study providers and qualitative data provided by CEFs elicited the following key strategic and operational issues for community education.

Clarifying the Approach of the CEFs

Some of the strategic interviewees indicated that it would be useful to discuss taking a standard approach to how CEFs engage with groups in their local areas. This debate mirrored the one presented in the background section, but those who mentioned this issue mentioned the need for a consistent approach to be adopted.

Two of the interviewees expressed a perception that a purely community development approach to fostering community education in local areas results in CEFs working below capacity as they must 'sit there' and wait for groups to come to them. However, some of the interviewees did reflect that the community development approach does not involve a sit

back and wait approach. Instead, the community education service proactively works with local brokers to identify need and support development of capacity to respond to those needs.

Lack of Resources

The majority of qualitative cases highlighted this issue for community education. In particular, many highlighted the continuing need for a separate stream of funding from DES, "Implement the White Paper and get funding sorted" (case study provider #11).

A Clear Policy for Community Education

Many of the case study providers stated clearly that the White Paper had not been fully implemented, although they did feel that it had contributed to an increased visibility for community education. Some of the providers and strategic interviewees indicated that community education policy needed clear direction. Two of the strategic interviewees indicated that this direction could possibly be part of the provision of an integrated service for adult education where resources would be provided to the VECs from DES and they would distribute it across programmes according to identified need on an annual basis:

> "Yes would be an integrated service rather than, I'm community education they're my people, I am literacy they are my people. [It's] all about keeping our own people keeping our numbers rather than keeping it about need and responding to change... You put the money wherever you need it... more flexibility... people have to think about what they're doing and why they are doing it" (strategic interviewee #6).

Others expressed a desire to think about a national direction for community education alone. One CEF expressed a concern at an integrated service: "I feel that the proposal to have internal VEC personnel decide how [the] adult education from DES will be split will signal the end of community education as more and more money will be taken from community education and used on other services (admin etc.) within the VEC" (CEF).

Distinguishing Community Education from other types of Provision

The views in the qualitative data under this theme revolved around two issues. The first were concerns by some strategic interviewees that community education is no longer distinct from other types of provision. The reasons for this concern were threefold: 1) because it does not facilitate the collective empowerment and active citizenship outcomes expressed in the White Paper; 2) there is an over emphasis on the social aspect of community education, and 3) it

does not focus on the needs of the most disadvantaged any longer, "how does it distinguish itself from what is happening in the VEC centre" (strategic interviewee #1).

The second issue under this theme was the need for rigorous measurement of the outcomes of community education to illustrate its unique contribution:

> "I think the most serious challenge, apart from the funding one... is measuring outcomes and social impact, being able to demonstrate its value for money and its cost-benefit to society. I think as a sector we have been grossly incompetent in measuring our outcomes... we could stand up and say we have to find a way of doing this. If we do that then I have no doubt that they will be the horses to harness for community education's growth and sustainability" (strategic interviewee #3).

Some of the CEFs also reiterated that current tools used to assess the outcomes of community education were not appropriate for capturing the wider benefits of community education.

Emphasis on Accreditation and Progression to Further Education

Many case study providers and CEFs and one strategic interviewee expressed concern that DES was overemphasizing these outcomes for community education, which they felt overshadowed the other outcomes of community education and the importance of non-accredited learning, "[There is] lack of recognition for non-certified learning at a local and national level, almost complete focus on labour market preparation as an expected outcome of community education" (CEF).

Its Strength is its Location

Some of the strategic interviewees highlighted that the strength of the community education sector and the CEFs' work was that it could be a local response to local needs that respected local differences.

Most of the case study providers indicated that they were part of and felt very supported by local networks of groups with whom they could exchange resources such as financial support, information, progression options for learners and so on. This finding shows that they see themselves as part of local civil societies that are working to respond the specific needs of their local areas. Many included that the CEF belonged to that local network of support for them. Some also indicated that the BTEI Community Strand had been a welcome facilitator of their work to respond to local needs.

Not Solely the Remit of VECs

Some of the case study providers and one of the strategic interviewees expressed concern about community education being solely resourced through the VECs, "there is a sense that we are battling against the VECs wanting to have it all for themselves. [Need to] find a way that our sector is integrated, more recognized, how do you recognize the more independent flavour that is ours" (case study provider #8).

FETAC

Two issues were identified under this theme. The first was identified by some providers as the significant resources required to maintain quality assurance systems, which are now a requirement under the Qualifications Act. While those who expressed this concern were positively disposed to the provision of nationally recognized certification they felt that this aspect of their work was one that was not resourced sufficiently and it threatened their sustainability as a result.

The second issue relates to the level of certification that should be available through community education provision. There was great debate about this matter with some insisting that community education should only provide courses at Level 4 or below otherwise there would be duplication with other services. One interviewee felt that in some cases providers were providing Level 5 and above to learners who were not adequately prepared for these levels. Others insisted that it was important to provide higher levels in a community education setting for people who would not be able to access it elsewhere due to dispositional and circumstantial barriers.

Analysis

The data presented in this chapter demonstrates that there is significant variation in how ALCES community education is managed and funded, and how decisions are made to distribute funding. In particular, the only consistently employed criteria for funding is that a group demonstrates the need for a course themselves (90%) or were from a group named in the White Paper (72%). VECs were less likely to use process-focused criteria like employing creative methods or fostering a gender/ class analysis to make decisions about funding. However, 81% did use one of the criteria related to target group or income and educational disadvantage to make decisions about funding a group.

The issue of variation in management is linked in the qualitative data to a need to express a clear national vision for community education, adopt a consistent approach to community

education management and support and to distinguish community education from other types of provision.

Issues around accreditation and quality assurance were also documented through the qualitative data. Participants articulated a concern about what they perceived as increased emphasis on progression for community education learners and debated about what level community education should be accredited to. The resource intensive nature of quality assurance was also reported.

The data also shows that community education is seen as a local response to local needs and it is still strong in carrying out this role. CEFs facilitate this work to both ALCES funded and BTEI Community Strand funded groups and devote a significant amount of work to the technical support of groups.

The data also demonstrated a clear lack of effective tools and processes to track the outcomes of community education from the group up to the VEC. Some CEFs highlighted lack of funding for community education as a barrier to their work.

DISCUSSION

The results relating to the management and support of community education highlight some challenges. For instance, the lack of a consistent approach to the management of ALCES funded community education across the VECs means that the unique process and role of it expressed in the White Paper may not be being implemented uniformly. This conclusion is borne out by the fact that VECs were less likely to use process focused criteria such as participatory methodologies, a focus on social/community action or those pertaining to critical analysis to make decisions about what groups to fund. Yet, these aspects of methodology are, according to the White Paper, what make community education unique. Therefore, it runs the risk of being indistinguishable from other types of provision.

This challenge of differentiating it from other types of provision is compounded by what some participants see as an increasing emphasis on learners gaining certification and progressing to other types of education and training.

Another challenge highlighted through the data is a risk that the disadvantaged groups named at policy level are not being effectively targeted in the actual provision of ALCES funded community education. We can see from the criteria used to make funding decisions that while most of the VECs would look to see if groups applying for resources are one of the

target groups in the White Paper they are less likely to look for individuals in those groups who are experiencing educational or income disadvantage, which would assist them to support groups who are comprised of the State target groups.

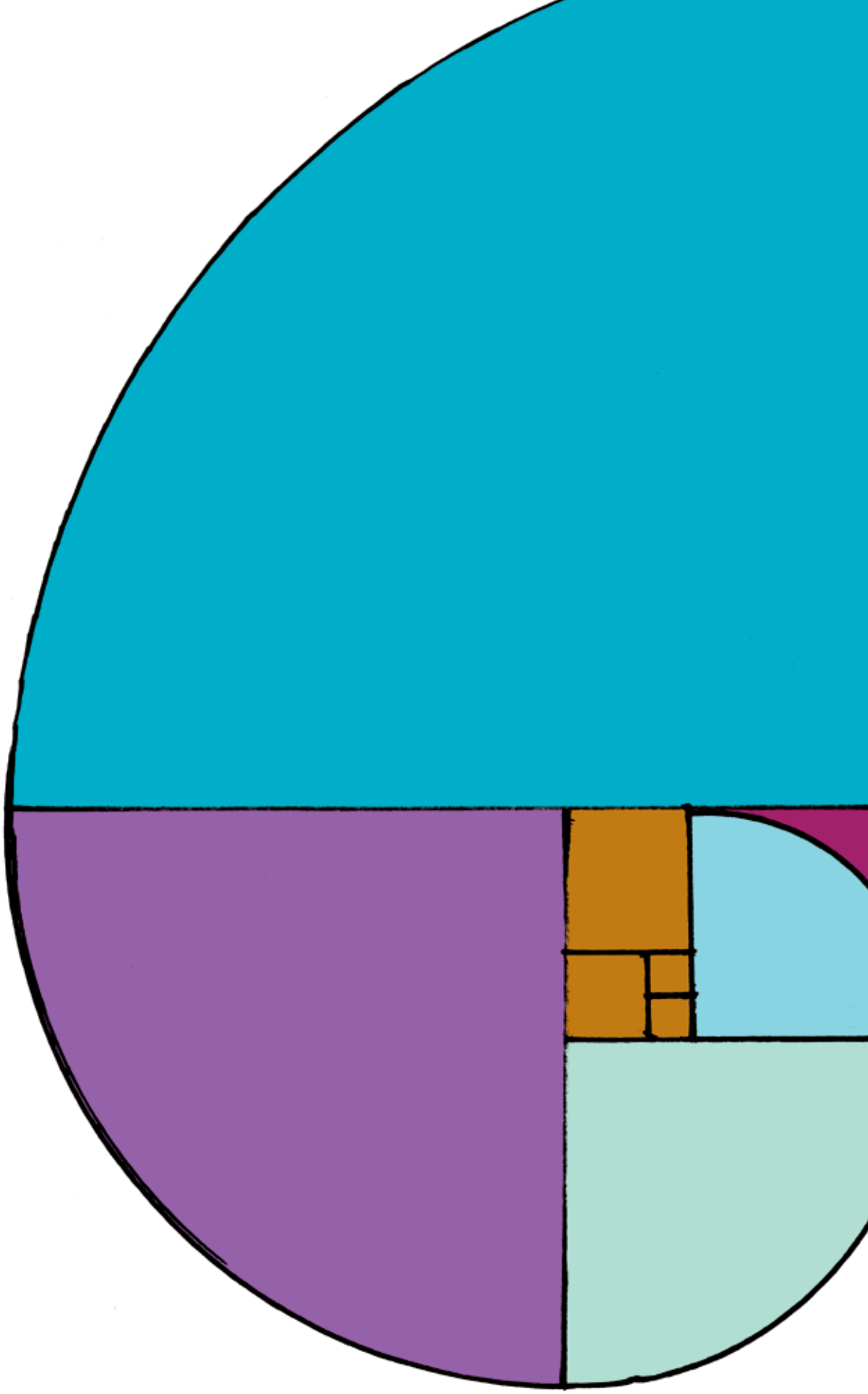
If the most often used criteria for funding is that groups themselves must identify the need for the course there is a danger that traditional groups may come forward to avail of opportunities as was expressed in the last chapter and in the qualitative data presented above.

We can see from the last chapter that despite the concerns voiced in this chapter community education is being provided to disadvantaged individuals. It is testament to the CEFs deep-rooted knowledge of the communities they serve that this situation is the case. Also, the data showed that the majority of services are using at least one of the criteria in Table 5.4 related to target group or disadvantage to fund groups. However, the last chapter also showed that there is over-recruitment of the more traditional target groups to community education such as women.

The targeting of harder-to-reach disadvantaged groups could be more effective if criteria relating to the specific priority groups were used by all services in decisions about how to distribute funding. These criteria could be standard but flexible enough for local services, with room for diversity of circumstance in groups like learners with third level education. As described in the last chapter, coupled with these criteria, policy-makers need to articulate the proportion of learners they would like to see represented in each of the priority target groups.

The results also show that there is a lack of effective tools to track outcomes of community education. These tools would most likely support the implementation of a consistent approach to it. A key issue identified was that it is a challenge for providers to maintain and submit records, a facet which would need to be taken into account in any strategies to track outcomes from the ground up.

Finally, we can see that for the most part, learners do not stay in community education for very long and they find out about opportunities through word of mouth. The former finding may indicate that ALCES funded community education is successful at bridging disadvantaged learners into other types of education and training, something that will be explored in Chapter Nine. The latter finding demonstrates that word of mouth is an effective means of promoting community education. However, in order to recruit hard-to-reach groups into community education, providers may need to use other means of encouraging their involvement. As described in the last chapter, supporting and engaging educationally disadvantaged adults involves intensive work to remove barriers. The nature of that work is explored in the next chapter.



6 HOW DOES COMMUNITY EDUCATION FACILITATE ACCESS, PERSISTENCE AND RETENTION?

If you take a mainstream tutor with no experience working in the community they could have assumptions of people living in those areas. They might be afraid. They would have almost certainly made assumptions about people that live in disadvantaged areas. If you're coming into a situation and you have to teach people... [if] that you're not really coming at it with an empathetic view, people would sense that. Your manner, your demeanor it's not going to be conducive. Maybe it is if you're a really good professional teacher, but that style, you are dealing with people that typically would have had different experiences in formal education they're just not going to react well to chalk and talk (case study provider #6).

INTRODUCTION

This section compares literature about access, persistence and retention of community education learners to the relevant results of the learner's survey, qualitative reflections from case study providers about how they support and retain learners and feedback from the strategic interviews and case study learners.

The main findings from this chapter are:

- Community education providers facilitate a way into the learning setting by removing institutional barriers to access through flexible course provision and a welcoming environment.
- The main reasons learners become involved in community education are for social interaction, to become more involved in their communities and to raise their self-confidence. In particular, this finding is linked in the data to community education's unique role in addressing social isolation.
- It is particularly important for rural people to link into community education as a way to become more involved in the community.
- It is still particularly important for women to engage in community education for social interaction, which addresses their isolation in the home.
- Providers encourage learners' persistence by dedicating significant resources to ensuring that their interactions with learners are: positive, frequent and helpful; their spaces are welcoming and inviting, and they ensure an experience of dignity and respect for the learner. Likewise, learners deem these supports to be important.
- For those who have lower educational levels and for women it is still important that providers encourage access with a warm, friendly, welcome into the learning environment.
- DES funded community education is effective at offering supports that encourage the persistence of learners, many of whom are disadvantaged.

BACKGROUND

The White Paper acknowledged community education providers' attention to supports was essential to fruitful access and learning. The table below sets out documented learner barriers, supports and motivations described for both adult and community education.

Table 6.1 Facilitating Participation in Community Education[107]

Supports/Incentives	Barriers	Motivation
Flexible working hours	Job commitments	Doing job better
Receiving accreditation	Family commitments/ lack of childcare	Obtaining certificate/ diploma, qualification
Individualised study programme (adapted to needs)	Threat to leisure	Achieving more personal satisfaction
Choice of learning methods (c)	Perception of being too old to learn	Increasing general knowledge
Access to tailored information and advice (c)	Lack of transport (c)	Acquiring specific skills
Face to face outreach worker supported them to go from home to centre (c)	Not enough places on programmes	Become more involved in the community (c)
Funding for childcare/ transport (c)	Lack of confidence (c)	Desire for social interaction (c)
Free fees (c)	Negative attitudes friends/ family (c)	
Provision of safe space (c)	Lack of access to guidance information and advice (c)	
Experience of dignity and respect for learner (c)	Live Register criteria (c)	
Peer support/ mentoring in the learning setting (c)	Self-financing rule (c)	
Timing of courses (c)	Cost of courses (c)	
'Check ins' with learner to see how they are getting on (c)	Literacy challenges (c)	
Welcoming atmosphere (c)		

The supports, motivations and barriers that are mentioned in the literature about community education are usually linked to the specific needs of learners many of

107 from a number of different sources. Those that have been described for community education specifically have a "c" next to them. For instance see Owens, T. (2000). Men on the Move: a Study of Barriers to Male Participation in Education and Training. AONTAS: Dublin. And WERRC. (2001). Women at the Forefront: the Role of Women's Community Education Groups in Combating Poverty and Disadvantage. AONTAS: Dublin. The others are sources from CEDEFOP. (2004). Lifelong learning: citizens' views in close-up. Findings from a dedicated Eurobarometer survey. CEDEFOP: Brussels.

whom are traditionally from disadvantaged groups. For instance, community education addresses women's isolation in the home due to childcare responsibilities by providing social interaction, childcare and appropriate timing of courses. For early school leavers a warm, welcoming 'non-school' environment ensures that they are not reminded of a setting they were alienated from as does a choice of learning methods.

These supports are described as essential to encourage the persistence of adult learners. Carpintieri contends that this term is more appropriate than retention, because it is learner centred, "focusing on how, from the learner's point of view, he or she is supported throughout the learning journey, both during formal study and during periods of self-directed learning."[108] Encouraging persistence, particularly for non-traditional or hard to reach learners involves: a focus on developing self-confidence; understanding and responding to the situational, dispositional, institutional and informational barriers[109] in people's lives, and employing appropriate pedagogy. Appropriate pedagogy includes creating a 'safe and relaxed learning environment" and "the development of a community of learners."[110]

The Education Equality Initiative, part of the community education movement in Ireland, found that addressing barriers to learning in provision was absolutely essential and that providers could not do this work alone. Instead, they needed to work with local agencies to remove barriers for learners. Another essential facet of activating the participation of educationally disadvantaged adults was outreach, including: "door to door visits; community consultation; peer-support groups; one-to-one mentoring; and a gateway project where the project became a referral agency for the target group."[111]

The research presented here builds on previous studies by attempting to validate the documented findings in regard to the supports and sources of motivation that help learners to access, attend and persist with community education programmes.

108 Carpintieri, JD. (2008). Persistence: Research Briefing. NRDC: UK. 3.

109 Ibid. Also see Further Education Development Unit. BTEI: Certification Matters – Guidelines to Support Certification Outcomes in BTEI Funded Programmes. FEDU: Dublin.

110 Ibid. 4

111 Keogh, H. (2007). Education Equality Initiative: Lessons and Impact. Department of Education and Skills: Ireland.

RELEVANT RESULTS

In the learner's survey respondents were asked about their motivation for engagement in community education, what helped them make the decision to attend their current provider, supports they thought were important for community education and any barriers to learning experienced. Results from the survey are set against qualitative reflections on these aspects of provision from the case study provider interviews, strategic interviews and case study learners.

Motivations for Participation

In the survey, learners were presented with a number of reasons that may have motivated them to participate in community education in the first place. The frequencies for their responses are set out in the table below.

Table 6.2 Percentage Learners' Reasons for Taking Part

Reason for taking part (%)	Yes, and have achieved this goal	Yes, but have not achieved this goal yet	TOTAL Yes	No, not a reason
To make friends and have social contact	87	5	92	8
To have fun	82	4	86	14
To get more involved in the community	73	8	81	19
To improve my self confidence	70	8	78	22
To study a particular topic	61	10	71	29
To improve my health/ fitness levels	44	7	51	49
To help me move on to further study	34	18	52	48
To get a qualification	31	15	46	54
To improve my employment prospects and get a job	28	17	45	55
To improve my reading or writing skills	27	6	33	67
To improve my understanding of another culture	27	8	35	65
To understand my experience as a member of a disadvantaged group	17	6	23	77
Told I had to do the course	4	1	5	95

As can be seen the top three reasons for taking part in community education that learners had achieved were to make friends and have social contact, to have fun and to

get more involved in the community closely followed by improving self confidence and studying a particular topic. Of note is that when the percentage of 'yes' responses are added together we can see that half the respondents wanted to improve their health or fitness levels or move on to further study.

It is of further note that if all yes percentages are added together for employment prospects and getting a qualification almost half the learners had these as reasons for participating.

Generally, the percentage of learners who had not met their original goals is quite low, although 18% said that they had not met their goal of moving on to further study while 17% said they had not yet improved their employment prospects. It is difficult to know if these figures relate to courses not meeting learners' needs or that they had not yet completed their course and were not ready to progress.

The high percentage of people who indicated that they had not been told to do community education means that their participation was voluntary. It is of note that very few learners indicated a motivation to participate in community education in order to understand their experience as a member of a disadvantaged group in Irish society. This result is at odds with the articulated emphasis in community education on fostering learners' analysis of the structural constraints of their lives. However, the results here do not mean that learners do not experience that analysis as an outcome from community education.

Analysis of the top three reasons for participating by age, gender, education levels and rural/urban indicator reveal that significantly more women than men participated to make friends and have social contact [$c2(2)= 17.3$, $p < .001$]. Significantly more women than men participated to have fun [$c2(2)= 28.13$, $p < .001$]. Significantly more rural than urban participated to have fun [$c2(2)= 6.52$, $p < .05$] and significantly more rural than urban participated to get more involved in the community [$c2(2)= 10.18$, $p < .05$]. The age of learners was not significantly related to any of the top three reasons for participating.

Qualitative Data

Strategic interviewees were asked to reflect on why learners become involved in community education by considering the results of a preliminary analysis of a partial data set of the learners survey (N=287). They were presented with what were, at that time, the top three reasons for participating: having fun, making friends and improving self-confidence.

All reflected that those goals made sense for community education learners and were consistent with what they thought their motivations would be, although some pointed out that while those might be the initial motivations for engaging, the process of community education helped people to develop more specific goals, "Self-confidence is a huge one and very often it's the reason why people take the first step in but its not why they remain in it" (strategic interviewee #3).

Some interviewees stressed that community education should not just be for having social contact and gaining confidence, "community education shouldn't be just about having social contact and going nowhere" (strategic interviewee #9). These interviewees felt that learners should progress from community education to other VEC services or that there should be a focus on skills acquisition to the learning.

Others felt that the unique contribution of community education was to civic engagement and stressed the importance of that facet of it being promoted to learners. They felt that if that was not present as a motivation for learners, that the need for social contact and fun could be met through other types of community activities or adult learning.

Case study learners had a variety of reasons for engaging in community education, but the majority verbally articulated that they either wanted social interaction or to gain confidence, "when we [her and her husband] purchased our house I felt very inadequate with the neighbours" (present learner #4). Another learner said, "The big thing was not to be stuck at home, stuck in the house" (present learner #5).

Analysis

It appears that, in the main, learners motivations for becoming involved in community education were for personal development and social interaction. Qualitative feedback indicated the importance of participation in community education being community building or cohesion. Otherwise, they felt other community activities or adult learning opportunities could just as easily meet learners' motivations. However, 81% of learners chose to participate in community education to become more involved in their community, indicating that they may see it as a route to community cohesion. Further consideration will be given to validating this finding when we see if learners experienced outcomes related to civic and social engagement in the next chapter.

Of note is that it was particularly significant to rural learners to get involved in their communities through community education. This finding shows that community education may play a particular role in assisting community cohesion in rural areas.

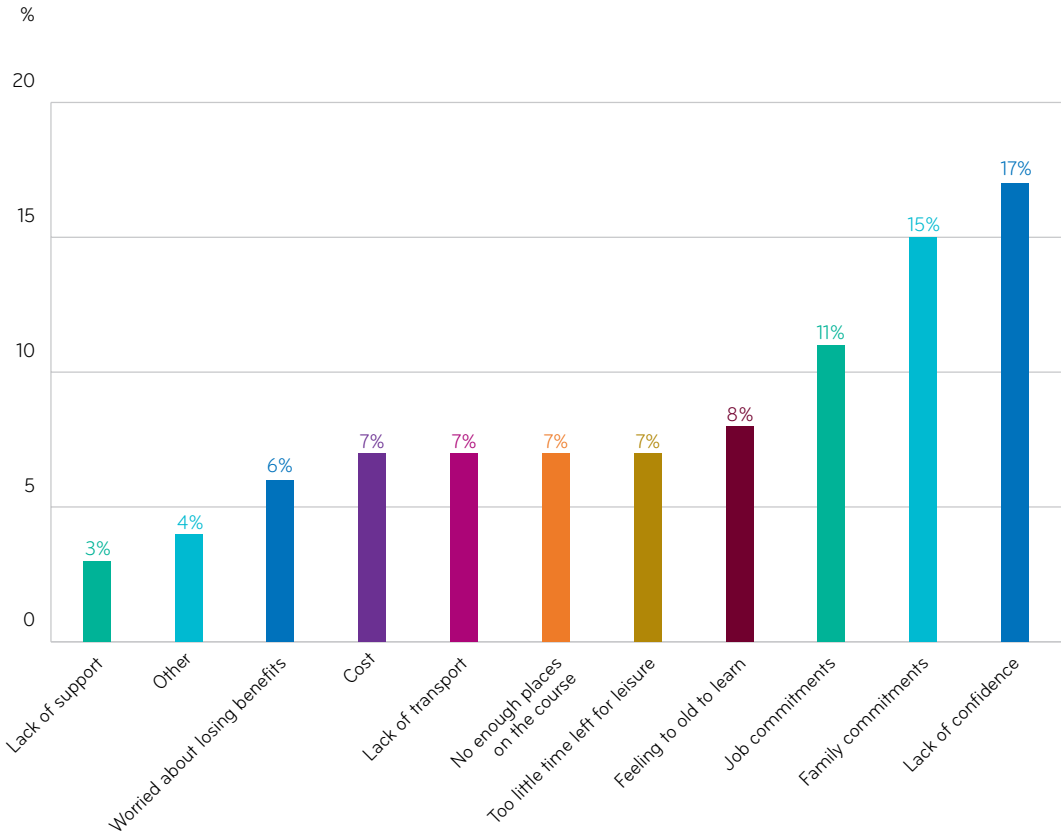
The fact that it was important to women to take part for social contact and fun may validate community education's role in assisting women to combat isolation.

It does seem that progression to the labour market is an emerging motivation for some learners as is attaining qualifications.

Barriers to Participation

Learners were asked to consider a list of possible barriers to participation in community education and select any that were relevant to them. The figure below presents the percentage of learners for whom each barrier was an issue.

Figure 6.1 Percentage Learners Barriers to Participation



As we can see from the figure the top three barriers were lack of confidence, family commitments and job commitments. The number of learners experiencing these barriers was relatively small.

An analysis of the frequencies reveals that women were more likely than men to report family commitments or lack of childcare to be a barrier [c2(1)= 6.41, p < .05] as were those aged 25-44 years. Urban participants were significantly more likely to report family commitments or lack of childcare as a barrier to participation [c2(1)= 13198, p < .001].

The 16-24 year old age group was significantly more likely to cite job commitments as a barrier while those aged 65 years and over are significantly less likely to report experiencing this barrier as they are past working age [c2(3)= 19.29, p < .001]. Participants with lower secondary or less education were also significantly less likely [c2(2)= 6.26, p < .05] to cite job commitments as a barrier.

Qualitative Data

Strategic interviewees were asked how community education could respond to the three main barriers identified. The first thing that many of them commented on was the low number of people indicating barriers. They thought that these results indicated that community education groups were responding effectively to barriers to participation in their provision. Their main feedback about how to address the barriers was to continue to keep the provision flexible in terms of timing and location.

The case study learners had little comment on barriers to participation. Instead they spoke more about the kind of supports they received in their learning and how the learning fostered their self-confidence.

Analysis

The data presented in this section can be explained in two ways. Firstly, the low frequency of participants experiencing the top three barriers could be attributed to community education groups effectively removing barriers to participation through flexible provision. Secondly, the results could be explained by the sample. Less than half the survey respondents had dependent children (42%) and only 24% were working for pay or profit. Many were retired or looking after home or family. Therefore, they would be less likely to experience barriers related to childcare or job commitments.

For those learners for whom lack of self-confidence was cited as a barrier, we can only assume that their providers addressed that barrier as they were currently involved in community education. The citing of any of these barriers, despite the low frequency, does mean that flexible, non-threatening provision is important for learners.

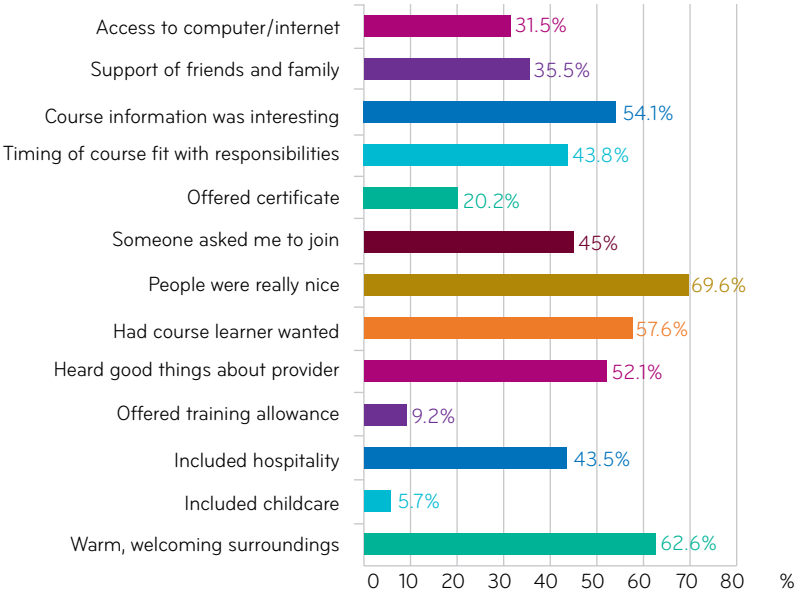
Supporting and Retaining Learners

This section presents data about the factors that support learners to access community education and stay in it.

Facilitating Access

Learners were also asked which factors helped them make their decision to attend their current provider. Their answers are set out in the figure below.

Figure 6.2 Factors Facilitating Access to Community Education



From the figure we can see that the top three factors were that the people were really nice (69.6%), the surroundings were warm and welcoming (62.6%), and the provider had the course the learner wanted to do (57.6%). The inclusion of childcare was the least selected facilitator of access, next to offering a training allowance and certification.

Of note is that the number of people indicating that the timing of the course fit with their caring responsibilities (43.8%) is similar to the number of learners indicating they have dependent children.

The following trends emerge when we significance test the top three factors against gender, age, education levels and urban/rural variables. Men in the sample were

significantly less likely to say 'the people were really nice' ($c2(1)= 19.71$, $p < .001$). Learners with post-secondary education were significantly less likely ($c2(2)= 9.359$, $p < .05$) to indicate that 'the people were really nice' helped them make their decision to attend.

Men in the sample were significantly less likely to say 'warm and welcoming surroundings' ($c2(1)= 11.191$, $p = .001$), as were those in the 25-44 yrs age group ($c2(3)= 8.783$, $p < .05$). Those with post-secondary education were also significantly less likely to indicate that they made their decision to attend their provider because the surroundings were warm and welcoming ($c2(2)= 10.16$, $p < .05$).

These trends tell us that for women and those with upper secondary education or less that warm and welcoming surroundings and nice people are significant factors facilitating their access to community education.

Supporting Learners

Both VEC Personnel and learners were asked to consider a range of learner supports and indicate if they were essential/important and if they were provided for learners or not. The figure on the opposite page compares their responses.[112]

The supports most often chosen as essential by VEC Personnel were: warm, welcoming, surroundings (100%); experience of dignity and respect for the learner (98%), and provision of a safe space (90%). The top three VEC personnel said were provided were: warm welcoming surroundings (92%); experience of dignity and respect for the learner (89%) and timing of courses (80%).

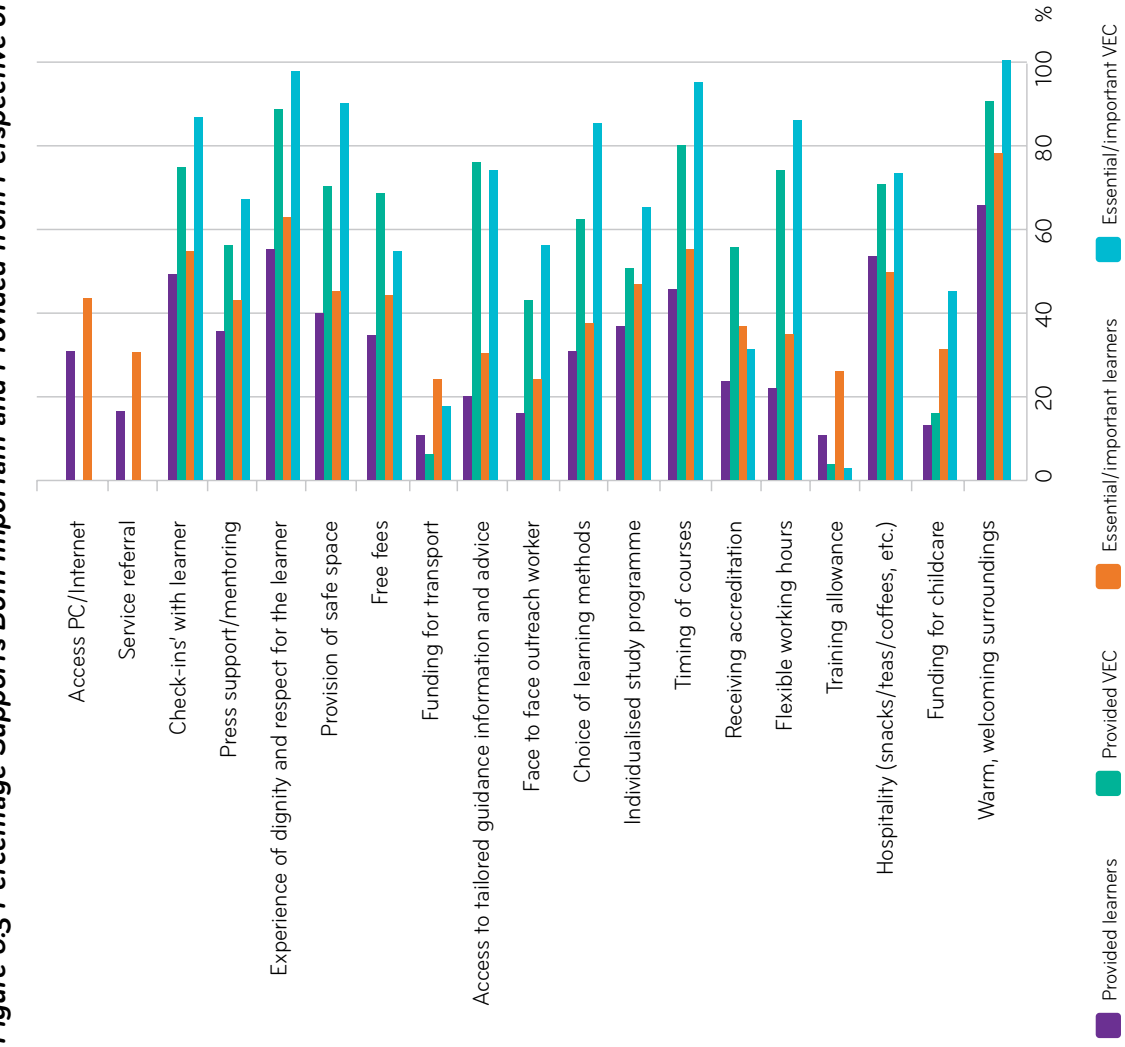
The top important supports for community education identified by learners were warm welcoming surroundings (78%), experience of dignity and respect for the learner (62%), appropriate timing of course (53%) and check-ins with the learner (53%). These mirror the top three supports VEC personnel said were provided for learners. Also of note was that 51% learners said that hospitality was an important support.

The supports perceived least important by VEC Personnel were training allowance (2%), transport support (18%) and childcare (44%). Learners chose similarly and perceived transport (24%), training allowance (25%) and outreach worker (26%) as the least important supports. Only 29% saw childcare as an important support.

What Figure 6.3 shows us is that personnel were more likely to indicate that the learner supports listed were both important and provided compared to learners.

112 VEC Personnel were not asked about service referral or access to PC/Internet.

Figure 6.3 Percentage Supports Both Important and Provided from Perspective of Learners and VEC Personnel



Qualitative Feedback

The case study providers were asked what they did to retain learners or encourage them to persist. Their responses reflected the types of support asked about in the learner's survey. As one provider said, "we mind them" (case study provider #4). Many emphasised the importance of human engagement with the learners where there was a great deal of informal contact and checking in with learners and between staff to assess need, identify curriculum and review provision, "there is talk about work going on [in here] informally all the time. [That is] only possible, because so many people are from the community. We are responsive to peoples' issues. [There is] an awful lot of communication" (case study provider 1).

Three providers indicated that they engaged in creating individual learning plans with learners that are regularly reviewed with the learner. Most providers also acknowledged that they gathered feedback from learners through evaluation of courses and regular meetings with tutors. Many providers also provided referrals to other services in the community that could assist learners facing barriers.

Most providers indicated that they had no issues retaining learners. Instead, they experienced challenges responding to the need for the learning opportunities they provided. They identified that in a minority of situations they could not encourage persistence for learners who had situational and dispositional barriers that it was beyond their sphere of influence to address.

When asked what types of supports they would like to provide to learners but could not due to financial constraints the most often indicated supports were: increase in physical space; increase in staff resources, and more individualized learning supports such as literacy support.

The vast majority of case study learners articulated that their provider atmosphere was positive using words like warm, welcoming, helpful and lovely and that this atmosphere had been a reason for them to either access the provider or stay with them, as can be seen in the quotes below:

> "You couldn't have a nicer place, tutors are so helpful... I get on with them you could walk in and say hello" (present learner #2).

> "People are so welcoming and so helpful... I knew I wasn't just being put up with, a figure on a data sheet somewhere" (past learner #2).

> "The staff here are very helpful. They don't frighten you they sit down and explain whats involved" (past learner #11).
>
> "It was daunting to come back if I hadn't gotten it [warm, welcoming atmosphere] I would have done a runner, they were very welcoming" (past learner #9).

Case study learners were also asked to indicate which of the supports presented in Figure 6.4 were essential. There was a high degree of consensus amongst all of them that each of them was essential for community education learners. They also indicated that their providers made available the majority of the supports shown in Figure 6.4.

Analysis

We can see that for the learners in the survey sample access to community education providers was facilitated by welcoming surroundings, the positive disposition of providers to learners and relevance of course topic. It is surprising, given the historical emphasis on childcare provision as an essential support for community education that so few learners selected that this was a factor in their decision to attend their provider. However, it would seem from the frequencies from learners that their provider facilitated access by holding courses at a time that fit with their responsibilities.

What is clear is that for women and for those with upper secondary or less it is very important that their community education providers had warm, welcoming surroundings and the people were really nice in order for them to access the learning.

Once learners are in the door the main things that support them are an experience of dignity and respect, a warm and welcoming environment, continued appropriate timing of the course, check-ins with the learner and the provision of hospitality. It would seem from the qualitative feedback that a significant amount of resources are dedicated to providing these supports.

It is of note that VEC personnel were more likely than learners to see the supports asked about as important, although there was some demand from learners for the supports named.

DISCUSSION

The data presented here validates some of the documented motivations, supports and barriers for community education considered in Section 6.1. It validates that key motivations for participating in community education are to become more involved in the community and for social interaction. It also shows that learners become involved for reasons that are attributed to the general cohort of adult learners, such as skills acquisition and progression, although the latter is less likely to be a reason. Learners also became involved to increase their self-confidence highlighting that this was an issue for many of the respondents.

The data also reiterates the importance of community education for women in addressing isolation. It also validates the idea that community education has to pay particular attention to the positive disposition of tutors and providers and a welcoming atmosphere for those who are educationally disadvantaged as those in our sample who had lower education levels said this was an important facilitator of access for them. The results show that people from rural areas value community education as a way to get involved in their communities.

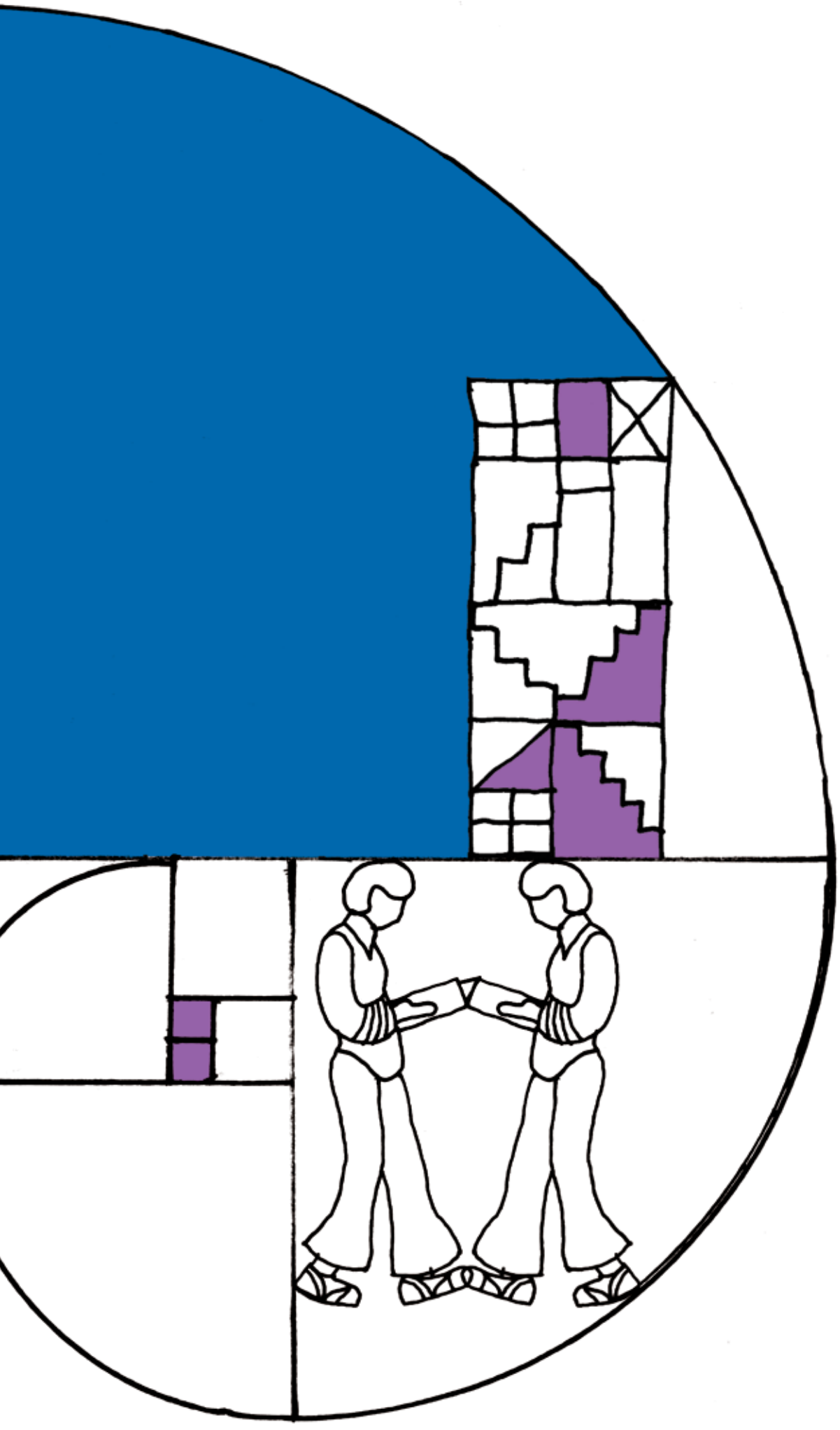
The most important supports for learners in this sample were also ones that have been clearly documented in the literature for community education, including the experience of dignity and respect for the learner, check-ins and hospitality.

An essential aspect of access and persistence was flexible provision that fit with learners' caring responsibilities. It would appear that this type of provision ameliorates the need for the other documented supports that were not deemed so important by learners, such as childcare and transport support.

Since a large proportion of learners from the survey sample and the case studies were experiencing some form of disadvantage we can see that DES funded community education is effective at offering supports that encourage persistence and are deemed essential for hard to reach learners, such as: the removal of institutional barriers through flexible provision, creating a safe learning environment and addressing dispositional barriers with constant encouragement and help.

There was some evidence from the sample that the other documented supports such as service referrals, outreach, guidance and individualized study programmes were important, but not as essential as the ones considered above.

It would also appear that the documented barriers to community education were less likely to have been experienced by the survey respondents. However, there is strong evidence to suggest that the flexible provision of courses and the supports put in place for the learners removed these barriers. Also, learners in the survey sample may have been less likely to experience some of these barriers since less than half had dependent children and only a quarter were in employment.



7 WHAT ARE THE CIVIC AND SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT OUTCOMES OF COMMUNITY EDUCATION?

Well [community education], it's something that happens within the community, and empowerment is a key feature, and its something that involves inclusiveness and working towards social change (case study provider #11).

INTRODUCTION

This chapter sets out the possible social and civic engagement outcomes (CSE) for learning and for community education. Quantitative results from the learner's survey are presented to see if those outcomes are validated for community education. Where appropriate VEC personnel's responses from their survey are presented for comparison. Qualitative data from strategic interviewees, case study providers and learners offers further elaboration on the quantitative results.

The main findings in this chapter are:

- Community education is effective at creating outcomes which foster strong social networks and interpersonal trust and tolerance. The majority of learners experienced positive change in regard to talking to new people (89%), trying out new activities (88%), more contact with friends (69%), accepting beliefs that are different to my own (64%), visiting new places (61%) and more accepting and understanding of other cultures (60%).
- It is less effective at fostering civic and political outcomes as the main outcomes in this area were only experienced by a third or less of learners. This finding is at odds with the stated emphasis in the White Paper on learners taking action to address structural disadvantage. Community education is partially meeting the Departmental aim for ALCES community education to contribute to civic life.
- However, community education did cause many learners to be more likely to intervene in situations in their community that threaten community cohesion like anti-social behaviour. Therefore, it does meet the Departmental aim for ALCES community education to enhance communities.
- If there is a desire to experience higher frequencies of civic and political outcomes in community education then civic engagement issues would need to be integrated into learning opportunities. A tentative conclusion is that practices in a social action model of community education are more effective at achieving CSE outcomes.
- The openness of the learning environment in community education is key to the achievement of CSE outcomes.

BACKGROUND

Civic engagement involves political and non-political activities which, assist individuals to participate in democratic and/or collective action for a civil society, thereby contributing to democracy. Social engagement is about participation in social networks. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development sets out the different social and civic micro-social outcomes education can have:

Table 7.1 CSE Outcomes[113]

Domains	Outcomes
Political activities	Voting, political involvement/ action, volunteering in political activities, donations to political causes
Civic (Non-political) activities	Participation in community and civil society organisations – community action, membership of a community group, volunteering, charity involvement, community involvement in schools
Social activities	Participation in wider social networks, other group membership, associations, interactions with family, friends and/or colleagues
Other activities	Following and critically interpreting the media/current affairs and or using ICT to do so, contributing to media or online discussions

There are also changes in belief and attitudes that come under this category of outcomes broadly categorised into trust (interpersonal, institutional, democratic) and tolerance (lifestyle permissiveness, diversity), which are also macro-social outcomes of learning.[114] Education assists realisation of the outcomes above through skills development to engage in activities and by challenging assumptions or giving information that changes values, attitudes and behaviours. There is a weak knowledge base linking education and CSE outcomes compared to health outcomes. However, the following points are salient from the evidence base about these outcomes:

113 taken from Chapter 4 OECD. (2007). Understanding the Social Outcomes of Learning. OECD: France entitled "Civic and Social Engagement Outcomes of Learning." 69.

114 Preston, J. and A. Green. (2003). *Wider Benefits of Learning Research Report no 9: The Macro-social Benefits of Education, Training and Skills in Comparative Perspective.* Centre for Research on Wider Benefits of Learning: UK

- Participation in adult learning is an important force for attitude change, central to civic and social outcomes. In a UK study participation in adult learning, except for vocational courses, resulted in an increase in civic and political participation.[115]
- Adult learning leads to increases in voter turnout, except if the learning has taken place in vocationally oriented learning.[116]
- Having a better-educated citizenry on the whole does not contribute to better CSE outcomes, indicated by falling levels of voter turnout and institutional trust despite higher levels of education in most modern societies.
- The most consistent independent variable affecting civic education outcomes in schools is the openness of the classroom climate, in other words it is how civics is taught that attains the best outcomes.[117]
- The experience and amount of direct CSE education an individual has dictates CSE outcomes in developing civic skills, trust and tolerance, whether or not an individual becomes involved in expressive political engagement (engagement in voluntary/ community action), and develops institutional trust.
- Peer group and the shared level of education mediate the effect of education on civic engagement and interpersonal trust.[118]
- A direct link between education and trust and tolerance at the macro-level is difficult to establish and requires qualitative research exploring the complex relationships between socialisation processes and CSE outcomes.[119]

This conclusion from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development is of particular note in terms of thinking about the impact of community education on civic and social engagement:

115 Feinstein et al. (2003). *Contribution of Adult Learning to Health and Social Capital.* Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning: UK.

116 OECD. (2006.). *Measuring the Effects of Education on Health and Civic Engagement: Proceedings of the Copenhagen Symposium.* OECD: France. 32.

117 Ibid.

118 these three points summarised from Chapter 4 OECD. (2007). *Understanding the Social Outcomes of Learning.* OECD: France entitled "Civic and Social Engagement Outcomes of Learning."

119 Preston, J. and A. Green. (2003). *Wider Benefits of Learning Research Report no 9: The Macro-social Benefits of Education, Training and Skills in Comparative Perspective.* Centre for Research on Wider Benefits of Learning: UK

> "The analysis suggests that more schooling or more citizenship studies offer a limited and partial response. Instead, addressing the quality of the learning experiences and approaches to learning both inside and outside formal school settings appear to be a more promising way forward."[120]

There are a number of documented civic and social engagement outcomes for community education at both the individual and the collective level since community education is supposed to encourage outcomes on both planes. They are set out in the table below.

Table 7.2 CSE Outcomes for Community Education[121]

	Civic and Social
Individual	Politicisation – critical awareness
	Positive role modelling for children
	Take up leadership positions
	Integration and tolerance
Collective	Creation of social networks
	Participation in voluntary/ community work
	Increased number of community fora
	Increased capacity for community problem-solving
	Increase in uptake/ representation in leadership positions in community
	Creation of strong, co-operative links between local groups and agencies
	Improved family cohesion

In terms of how what model or approach to community education might be most effective at facilitating CSE outcomes the Women's Community Education Quality Assurance Framework illustrates the practices that a women's community education group needs to engage in, in order to achieve civic and social engagement for learners. It articulates an action model of community education. This framework contains three elements of practice that can realize CSE outcomes. They are described in the table below.

120 Chapter 4 OECD. (2007). *Understanding the Social Outcomes of Learning.* OECD: France entitled "Civic and Social Engagement Outcomes of Learning." 88.

121 Summarized from a number of sources. See the citations list for these.

Table 7.3 Elements of Women's Community Education Quality Assurance Framework that can achieve CSE Outcomes[122]

Consciousness-raising Education	These practices describe how groups can integrate consciousness-raising education into their activities like providing women's studies courses
Empowerment	These practices set out how WCE organisations encourage and facilitate women to take up leadership roles and achieve their own goals such as: conducting activities that create solidarity between women in the group and encourage learners' participation in other projects or networks
Activism	Directs groups in how to engage in practices that encourage women learners to become active on issues affecting their lives if they so choose, such as: celebrating International Women's Day; organizing voter awareness; participating in protest or campaigning events, and having links to political representatives

This research investigates if there is a direct link between community education and the CSE outcomes alluded to here as well as what features of community education, if at all, facilitate these outcomes. One hypothesis tested is that community education directly causes civic engagement outcomes through a particular feature of community education, which is the open, informal, participatory ethos that is assigned to some approaches in community education. The research also considers what practices help to achieve CSE outcomes.

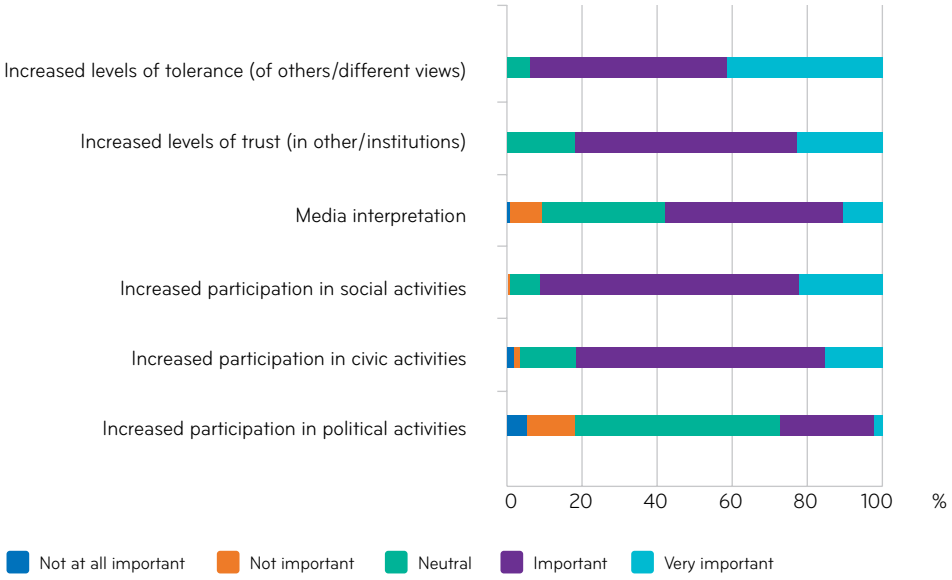
RELEVANT RESULTS

This section presents the results of the learners survey and the VEC personnel survey relating to civic, social and health outcomes of community education. It also offers qualitative feedback from the learner case studies, strategic interviews and provider interviews about those types of outcomes.

VEC personnel were asked about their perceived level of importance of civic and social engagement outcomes in community education. Their responses are set out in the figure over leaf.

122 AONTAS. (2009). *Flower Power: A Guidebook for Best Practice in Women's Community Education.* AONTAS: Dublin

Figure 7.1 VEC Personnel Perceived Importance of CSE Outcomes



We can see that, except for increased participation in political activities, VEC personnel generally perceived civic and social engagement outcomes to be important or very important. Ninety-two percent of the personnel perceived outcomes related to tolerance and social activity participation to be important or very important. Eighty-four percent felt that civic engagement outcomes were important for community education. However, they were less sure that community education should result in political outcomes as 72% indicated they were in the neutral or lower ends of the scale.

The table below presents the percentage of learners who experienced civic engagement outcomes as a result of their community education experience.

Table 7.4 Percentage Political and Civic Engagement Outcomes for Learners[123]

	Yes I did this and I feel it is as a result of community education	Yes I did this but not as a result of community education	Yes, I did this but I have always done it	No, I did not do this
Decided to give something back to the community	32	6	30	32
Used internet	29	9	42	19
Began to read more books	25	8	44	23
Volunteered in community group	25	8	26	40
Watched news more often	25	8	53	14
Talked to friends or family about politics or social issues	23	7	49	21
Went to parent-teacher meeting	23	9	40	27
Donated to a charity	22	9	56	13
Read newspaper	21	7	63	9
Voted in last local election	20	8	60	12
Voted in last EU election	19	59	8	14
Recycled	19	10	62	8
Helped neighbour	18	8	62	13
Questioned a politician	17	7	30	46
Voted in last national election	16	7	61	15
Voted in last referendum	15	7	60	18
Went to community policing/ neighbourhood watch meeting	12	5	15	67
Volunteered at child's school	10	5	20	65
Took part in a protest march	8	5	13	75
Wrote letter to newspaper or politician	7	4	8	81

123 outcomes related to use of communications media were meant to track critical media interpretation.

The table shows that the top civic engagement outcomes experienced by learners were decided to give something back to the community (32%), used the internet (29%), began to read more books (25%) and volunteered in a community group (25%). The proportion of the sample that attributed these outcomes to community education is small.

The outcomes learners were least likely to attribute to community education were volunteering at their child's school (10%), taking part in a protest march (8%) and writing to the newspaper or politician (7%). Small percentages of learners indicated that community education had caused them to begin to vote.

Analysis of the top five civic engagement outcomes against the key demographic variables shows that there were no significant differences for the outcomes related to gender, age or education. However, participants from rural areas were significantly less likely to cite giving back to the community as an outcome [c2(1)= 6.09, p < .05]. They were also less likely to cite using the internet as an outcome.[c2(1)= 13.74, p < .001]. The same trend occurred in regard to volunteering in a community group [c2(1)= 3.83, p = .05], watching the news [c2(1)= 4.44, p < .05] and beginning to read more books [c2(1)= 6.24, p < .05].

Learner's motivations for participating in community education were analysed to see if they had an impact on the achievement of the top civic engagement outcomes. No significant relationships emerged.

Results were analysed to see what percentage of learners in each type of course experienced the top civic engagement outcomes. Results are set out in the table below.

Table 7.5 Type of Course and Top Civic Engagement Outcome (% of those engaged in course type)[124]

Type of Course	Top Outcome
IT/ECDL	Used the Internet (43%)
Communications/Numeracy/Writing	Began to read more books (52%)
Hobbies	Decided to give something back to the community (27%)
Language	Numbers of learners too small to give significant results
Social/Personal/Professional Development	Decided to give something back to the community (42%)
Health/ First Aid	Decided to give something back to the community (67%)
Dance/Exercise/Drama/Music	Decided to give something back to the community (33%)
Social Studies	Volunteered in a community group (80%, N=8 people)
Parent/Child/Childcare	Numbers are too small to give significant results

124 Readers are reminded that relatively small numbers of learners reported civic engagement outcomes. Therefore, these results are not statistically significant and would need further testing.

We can see from the above table that certain top outcomes are linked to a certain type of course. For instance, giving something back to the community tends to be an outcome from hobbies, social/ personal/ professional development and the physical arts courses. For social studies the main outcome appears to be volunteering in a community group, although the number of people doing this type of course in the sample was quite small. Outcomes linked to critical media interpretation are more likely to occur in courses that involve engagement with media forms like communications or IT.

We now turn to results for the social engagement outcomes assessed through the learner's survey set out in the table below.

Table 7.6 Percentage Positive Change Social Engagement Outcomes Learners

	Large positive change	Some positive change	Total
Talking to new people	54	35	89
Trying out new activities	51	37	88
More contact with friends	37	32	69
More accepting and understanding of different beliefs	29	35	64
Visiting new places	34	27	61
More accepting and understanding of other cultures	31	29	60
More sympathy for people I would have normally judged badly	25	34	59
Confidence speaking to service providers	25	32	57
Positive role model for children	25	30	55
Understanding that things I do here can affect people globally	23	30	53
Confidence taking on leadership role	21	31	52
Willing to help neighbours	22	27	49
Greater trust in service providers	19	30	49
Trust in people in neighbourhood	17	28	45
Getting along with neighbours	19	25	44
More contact with family	23	20	43
Critical of discrimination against disadvantaged groups	15	25	40
Quantity quality time with children	18	21	39
Taking part in public speaking	16	16	32
Greater understanding how government works	15	14	29
Trust in political system	4	7	11

We can see from the above table that the top social engagement outcomes experienced by learners are talking to new people (89%), trying out new activities (88%) and more contact with friends (69%). Of note is that over half the sample indicated positive change in regard to outcomes related to trust and tolerance of other people. Learners were least likely to indicate they had experienced positive change in outcomes related to institutional trust like understanding how the government works (29%) and trust in the political system (11%). Few also indicated that they had experienced positive change in relation to taking part in public speaking (32%).

There were no significant differences for any of the groups in relation to experiencing positive change for these three outcomes when significance tested against the key demographic variables.

Again, results were analysed to see what percentage of learners in each type of course experienced the top social engagement outcomes. Results are set out in the table below.

Table 7.7 Type of Course and Top Social Engagement Outcome[125]

Type of Course	Top Outcome
IT/ECDL	Talking to new people (84%)
Communications/Numeracy/Writing	Talking to new people (96%)
Hobbies	Talking to new people (89%) and trying out new activities (89%)
Language	Numbers too small to be significant
Social/Personal/Professional Development	Trying out new activities (95%)
Health/First Aid	Talking to new people (100%)
Dance/Exercise/Drama/Music	Trying out new activities (90%)
Social Studies	Numbers too small to be significant
Parent/Child/Childcare	Numbers too small to be significant

We can see from the above table that talking to new people is the main outcome experienced for most courses. More contact with friends emerges as the main outcome for social studies courses. Trying out new activities emerges as the main outcome for hobbies and social/personal/ professional development.

125 Readers are reminded that relatively small numbers of learners reported civic engagement outcomes. Therefore, these results are not statistically significant and would need further testing.

Learners were also asked about if community education had changed their likelihood of doing something about series of situations in their local areas. The results of that question classified by the key demographic indicators are set out in the table below.

Table 7.8 Likelihood of Learners doing something about Situations in the Community[126]

Situations in the community	If I saw children skipping school and hanging out on a street corner	If I saw children putting graffiti on a local building	If children were showing disrespect to an adult	If a fight broke out in front of where I live	If the fire station closest to my home was in danger of having its budget cut
Total	%	%	%	%	%
	79	59	64	47	65
Gender					
Men	39	48	57	40	45
Women	48	61	66	49	69
Age group					
16-24 yrs	33	50	61	44	47
25-44 yrs	51	66	74	55	63
45-64 yrs	49	59	63	47	65
65+ yrs	39	53	56	41	71
Education					
Primary/lwr secondary	50	64	66	46	68
Secondary	42	53	65	46	68
Post secondary	38	57	58	43	57
Urban/Rural					
Urban	48	62	67	48	63
Rural	45	57	63	47	68

126 Sampson et al. (1991). "Neighbourhoods and Violent Crime: A multilevel study of collective efficacy". *Science*. 277. These 5 items are measures of informal social control. Along with social/cohesion & trust they have been found to be linked to lower levels of violent crime at the neighbourhood level

This table shows that most of the learners said they would be more likely to intervene in all the situations above except if a fight broke out in front of where they live (47%).

When these results are analysed they show that the oldest and youngest age groups were significantly less likely to do something about children skipping school and hanging out on a street corner compared to the middle aged groups [c2(3)= 8.12, p < .05]. Men were significantly less likely than women to say they would do something if they saw children putting graffiti on a local building [c2(1)= 4.87, p < .05].

Those aged 25-44 years were significantly more likely to do something about children showing disrespect to an adult while those aged 65 years and older were significantly less likely to do something when compared to other age groups [c2(3)= 12.08, p < .05]. Men were significantly less likely to do something about the fire station having its budget cut compared to women [c2(1)= 17.65, p < .001].

Learners were asked which facet of community education was most useful in helping them make positive changes in regard to the civic and social engagement outcomes they were asked about. The table below sets out the results of this question.

Table 7.9 Aspect Most Useful in Enabling Positive Change CSE Outcomes

Enabling positive change	Percentage
The overall atmosphere of the group	27
The content of my course	15
The way the facilitator/tutor treated the people taking part in the course	25
The way the people on the course got on with each other	23
The way we went about the learning	10
Total	**100**

This table shows that the most frequently chosen aspects of community education that enable CSE outcomes are the overall atmosphere in the group (27%), the way the facilitator/ tutor treated people (25%) and the way the people in the course got on with each other (23%).

Qualitative Data

Perspectives from the strategic interviews, provider case studies and interviews with case study learners are summarised under the main civic and social outcome areas.

Building Social Capital

Five of the strategic interviewees indicated some outcome for community education related to building social capital such as breaking down barriers in communities or generally being able to participate in their community. Many mentioned that community education could facilitate learners becoming role models in their communities or for their children in regard to the importance of education. Some also mentioned a role for community education in helping adults develop the skills needed to help their children do their homework.

All of the case study providers reported a commitment to fostering social capital in their communities through building levels of trust or tolerance or facilitating people's engagement in the social life of their communities, although one provider was careful to say that their work to build tolerance was not an explicit aim. Many described that they sought to build levels of trust or tolerance through modeling respect in the learning setting and also through the cultural and social mix of learners in their groups. As one provider operating in the border counties said, "by the nature of the fact that it's [the building] a Church of Ireland people have to get over prejudice just to come in here" (case study provider #5). Another reflected, "we would always challenge a statement that indicated prejudice, we do see [increased levels of tolerance] happening due to the mix of nationalities in the area. ESOL learners get a computer course as soon as they are ready so they are integrated, the welcoming atmosphere helps integration" (case study provider #9).

Qualitative reflections from the learner case studies in relation to social capital outcomes are reflected on under relevant headings below:

Increased levels of trust and tolerance Almost all of the case study learners experienced some or large positive change in relation to acceptance and understanding of other cultures, which had occurred as a result of content of programmes or mixing with people from other cultures and countries in the learning setting. Many had also experienced positive change in regard to being critical of discrimination against disadvantaged groups:

> "It opened my mind so much about people with disabilities about people, Travellers, all those different sort of groups. How I would treat people would be different, because we had the interaction. [We learned] how to do things, how not to do things, and if that was done in all small areas it would make huge social change" (past learner #10).

Almost all of the case study learners indicated experiencing some or large positive change in regard to acceptance of beliefs that were different to their own. Just over half indicated that they had experienced positive changes in having more sympathy for people they would have normally judged badly, "nobody knows what's going on for each individual person, you become more aware that you're not the centre of the universe everyone's got their own problems" (present learner #5).

Almost all the case studies reported that they had experienced no change in regard to increased levels of trust of the government. Less than half indicated positive change in regard to better understanding how the government works or trust of service providers. However, the majority said that they had experienced positive change in terms of their confidence in speaking with service providers.

Increased participation in social activities All case study learners indicated positive change in talking to new people and the majority had experienced more contact with friends as a result as well as trying out new activities. Levels of positive change were low for increased trust, 'getting along with' and helping neighbours.

Family connections Levels of positive change for quality time with children and more contact with family were low for case study learners, but the majority had experienced a positive change in their ability to be a role model for their children (or grandchildren, nieces/nephews). As one learner described, "they [her children] looked at me doing it and there never seemed to be any question of saying we're leaving school its [just] that's expected because me ma is trying to educate herself" (present learner #4).

Civic and Political Engagement, and Critical Interpretation

Almost all of the strategic interviewees highlighted civic engagement as a potential outcome for community education, "the community representatives, anyone I would have come across would have all engaged in community education" (strategic interviewee #7). Only one strategic interviewee indicated political and critical thinking outcomes for community education.

All but one case study provider indicated a commitment to learners achieving civic engagement as a result of community education and even the one who did not have an explicit commitment indicated that they saw it happen as a result of what they did. Work to achieve these outcomes was done in a variety of ways including recruiting learners into volunteering programmes co-ordinated by the provider, encouraging activity by having a database of community groups available for learners or established links to community

fora such as the safety forum. All providers could recount numerous examples of learners engaging in civic activities.

About half of the case study providers reported that they sought to increase learners' involvement in political activities. As one provider said:

> "Yes the aspiration would be, would hope they would become more aware of civic duties and responsibilities. Voting here [in the local area] is low. People do become more involved in the community. Subliminally we talk about elections and voter registration, but don't push it. We hope by increasing people's awareness of their community we will achieve those outcomes" (case study provider #9).

Case study learners were asked if they had experienced a range of civic and political engagement and critical interpretation outcomes. References to outcomes in regard to political engagement were low. However, most learners already voted. Just over half indicated that they had become involved in a community group as a result of community education either through volunteering for their provider in some way or joining another group. For instance, some of the case study learners had become volunteer tutors for their provider. The majority indicated that they 'had decided to give something back to the community' as result of community education. However, levels of participation in activities like protest marches or community meetings as a result of community education were low.

Case study learners were also asked about a series of activities that involved intervening in community life. Over half said they would be more likely or much more likely to protest if their fire hall was having its budget cut or if children were skipping school or putting graffiti on a local building. When asked why they would be more likely to intervene in these situations some said it was due to the fact that they had more confidence to get become involved as a result of community education while others indicated that community education had made them more aware of their community, "you understand more about local issues, it gives you an understanding of what community is about if you don't do something about it your community will die" (past learner 2)

For many case study learners community education had resulted in the development of public speaking and the confidence to take on a leadership role. The majority indicated positive change in relation to the latter.

Engagement in critical media interpretation was not high for many of the activities learners were asked about such as reading the newspaper or watching the news although

many already engaged in these activities. However the majority had used the internet as a result of community education and just under half had experienced a positive change in global awareness, "[I am] more aware coming here from talking to people, some of the people doing the courses come from farming backgrounds" (present learner #5).

Aspect of Community Education that Builds CSE

Most of the case study learners selected that either the content of the course or the tutor assisted them to make the positive changes in relation to these outcomes that they described. When asked to elaborate learners often remarked that it was the tutors' positive disposition and modeling of respect that facilitated changes or that they had examined social issues in the course that allowed them to become more aware of their communities. In regard to the former a learner said, "the tutors help you out, make you feel better, know more about what you want, make you feel good about yourself" (present learner #2).

Another learner reflected on how the tutor models how to treat others, "when there's a good atmosphere there's respect amongst the people and if there's respect there's a willingness to respect differences in points of view... that comes from the tutor down" (present learner #5).

Again, some case study learners reported the role of increased confidence in facilitating community involvement. As one said, "coming here you are aware of what the services give you... you learn that you don't have to have an academic vocation to be heard, your opinion is just as good as anyone else's" (present learner #4). Another said, "through my ability to sing I was able to give something to the community" (present learner #3).

Analysis

The data presented in this chapter has much to tell us about the achievement of CSE outcomes for community education. We can see that there is consistency between what CSE outcomes VEC personnel think are important for community education and those that are achieved. In particular, they did not think the achievement of political outcomes was important for community education and the frequency of these outcomes was very low for the sample. This feature is at odds with the case study providers many of whom indicated that they did have an explicit commitment to fostering political engagement.

The achievement of civic engagement outcomes was low compared to the social engagement and community situation outcomes with the top five outcomes only being

experienced by 25-32% of the learners. Rural learners were significantly less likely to indicate experiencing these outcomes compared to urban learners.

However, there was a difference between the learners survey sample and the case study learners with just over half indicating that they had begun to volunteer as a result of their community education experience. Many of the providers said that they wanted to achieve civic engagement outcomes and attempted to accomplish this work by having links to opportunities for learners who wanted to volunteer or become more active in their community.

The achievement of social engagement outcomes was very high for the sample, in particular, more contact with friends, talking to new people and trying out new activities. Significant percentages cited positive changes in relation to interpersonal trust and tolerance outcomes. Even higher percentages of learners indicated being more likely to intervene in four out of the five community involvement outcomes. The qualitative data suggests that achievement of these outcomes is linked to increased confidence to intervene in community life gained through community education and increased community pride.

The aspect most often cited as facilitating positive changes was the overall atmosphere in the group.

DISCUSSION

The results show that community education does result in many of the CSE outcomes named in the literature although to differing extents. It appears that community education is strong in facilitating social engagement and trust and tolerance. These results tell us that community education effectively facilitates the development of social networks. It is also effective at changing attitudes, a feature of adult learning presented in the literature review. Community education builds social capital.

Outcomes related to community involvement were experienced very frequently. These results tell us that community education has an important role in building safer, sustainable communities and that is does so by giving people the confidence to get involved in community building or by facilitating commitment to community. Therefore, the aim for ALCES community education of community enhancement is being met.

What is less clear is community education's role in building civic engagement and collective development as outcomes related to this facet were cited far less frequently than the social engagement and community involvement outcomes. If this role is meant to be the primary function of community education then it is not fulfilling its principal purpose. It seems to only partially meet the Department's aim for community education to contribute to civic society. However, perhaps it is more appropriate to ask the question, to what extent would we like to see civic engagement outcomes take place as a result of community education? While the number of learners citing the uptake of volunteering, let us say, is quite small, the impact of that outcome at national level could be significant. This impact will be assessed in Chapter Ten.

We know from Chapter Four that learners are less likely to say that tutors helped them plan to address problems in their communities, to talk to them about how to make changes in their communities and to understand the effect of society on personal experiences. These facets of the tutor-learner relationship are important to collective development and action. If there is a desire to increase civic outcomes as a result of community education then these features of the learning process would need to be emphasised.

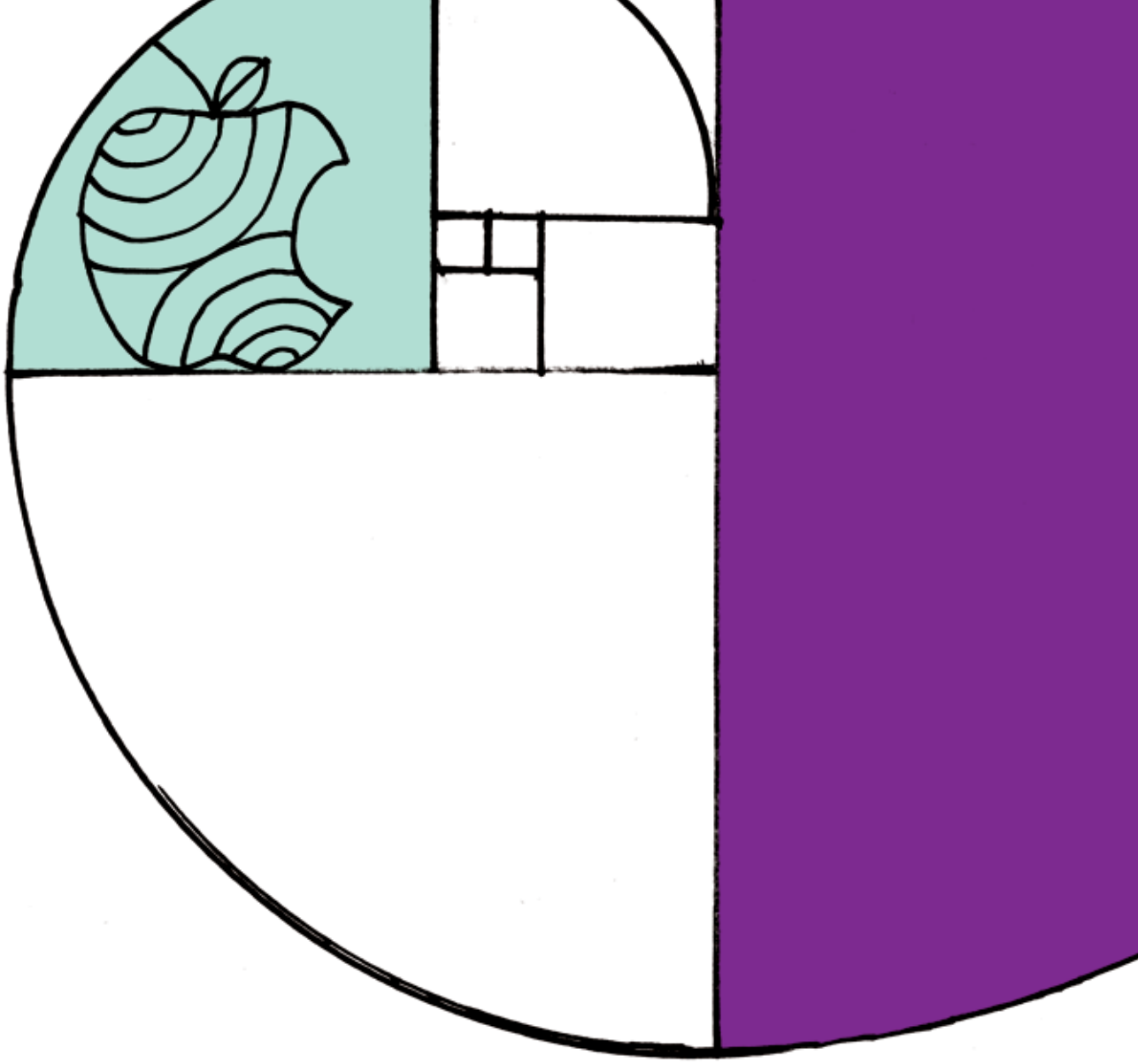
The results in this chapter bear out the literature, which states that it is the openness of the classroom environment that facilitates civic and social engagement outcomes. As we saw with the last chapter, community education groups retain an open, collaborative environment where the diverse lived experiences of the learners are heard, where they can talk about their localities, and discussion is highly valued. This environment facilitates the CSE outcomes explored in this chapter.

The case study providers demonstrated that they worked towards civic outcomes by ensuring that they had links to local civil society so that if learners chose, they could be linked to these opportunities by the centre. While the sample of learners from the providers is not representative they were more likely than those in the survey to say that they had engaged in volunteering as a result of community education. It would appear that offering learners a route to volunteering allows case study providers to achieve higher rates of civic engagement through voluntarism than those of the survey sample.

The practices case study providers engaged in to help learners become involved in civic life echo the practices articulated in the Women's Community Education Quality Assurance Framework, which is an action model of community education. Just over half of the case study providers were being funded under the BTEI Community Strand, which may mean that groups in this strand are more likely to be engaged in practices that can help to achieve civic engagement outcomes.

We know from Chapter Four that learners in the survey were most likely to have experienced the community organization or community development models of community education. The results of this chapter demonstrate that these models are not the most effective for encouraging civic outcomes. We could tentatively conclude that implementing a community/social action model could assist achievement of CSE outcomes in community education.

Of note is that people from rural areas were significantly less likely to indicate experiencing any of the civic engagement outcomes named. This tendency could require further investigation.



8 WHAT ARE THE HEALTH OUTCOMES OF COMMUNITY EDUCATION?

We invite people and learners in and they have to work in our environment so we're not fitting in [to the mainstream environment]. That means the community are seeing the abilities rather than the guys having to fit in first. [It's the] first stepping stone into mainstream. [It's] not them and us (case study provider #3).

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents literature about the health related outcomes of learning both physical and mental with a particular emphasis on outcomes that relate to beliefs about the self or personal development. Reports from the learner's survey about health outcomes are presented and explained in more detail with qualitative data from the strategic interviews, case study providers and learners.

The main points in this chapter are:

- Personal development outcomes are very high for community education, showing that providers and groups are achieving a central goal for it, which is to enhance the self-esteem and confidence of learners (experienced by 85% of learners). These goals are particularly important for educationally disadvantaged learners who need to improve their self-belief as a foundation for academic efficacy.
- Community education does not cause learners to experience negative changes in relation to their personal development. This finding shows how community education reproduces the conditions for equality in education as learners instead experience a sense of self worth and value regardless of their background.
- Tutors and peers create the conditions for positive personal development by recognising learners' positive skills and qualities. This recognition develops self-confidence, which fosters persistence and the ability to engage in participatory democracy.
- Community education is meeting a need for generic skills development for disadvantaged learners, which is a goal for policy-makers and providers.
- Health outcomes for community education are limited, but do happen. In particular, learners said that they began to eat more healthily (46%) and exercise more (41%).
- Because VEC personnel and case study providers saw health outcomes as important for community education the results ask us to consider to what extent we would like to see health outcomes happen as a result of community education.

HEALTH OUTCOMES OF ADULT LEARNING

The health outcomes of learning are better researched than CSE outcomes. While causation is always an issue, there are links between education and health in relation to the following mechanisms:

- Education can help individuals attain a better income, which almost certainly has health benefits.
- The skills needed to attain and process health information, solve health problems and engage with health services are fostered through learning.
- Education can affect health behaviours or making healthy choices.
- "Education has effects on key features of the self that are important for the formation of health outcomes," such as self-esteem, a sense of agency, positive valuation of the future and resilience or positive adaptation.

Again, differentiating between type of education and effect is at an early stage. Much research focuses on participation in schooling and/or level of educational attainment and health outcomes, which make it difficult to establish causality. The following point is of note:

> "Available evidence suggests that the impact of education on health is substantial. But it is important to stress the positional aspect to the benefits of education. There is an apparent tension between: a) education as investment in competencies and self-efficacy; and b) education as a sorting system which perpetuates or even reinforces socio-economic inequities that are bad for health."[127]

The policy consideration for health outcomes and education is whether to achieve better participation in education or engage in more targeted interventions. The following documented outcomes are important to this research and relate to research about negative outcomes of education or lack thereof, and positive health effects of education.

127 Again for a full discussion of this and the above issues see Chapter 5 in OECD. (2007). *Understanding the Social Outcomes of Learning.* OECD: France entitled "Health Outcomes of Learning." 110.

Table 8.1 Health Outcomes of Learning[128]

Domains	Outcomes
Adult Health	Mortality, physical health, depression, life satisfaction/happiness
Health Behaviours	Smoking, alcohol consumption, obesity, fruit and vegetable intake, physical activity, use of illicit narcotics, teenage parenthood
Service use	Use of primary health care, use of specialist care, hospitalisation, use of social health care, managing chronic health conditions
The Self	Self concepts (self-esteem and so forth), beliefs about health, patience, resilience, valuation of the future (increase in expectations)
Workplace, Neighbourhoods and Communities	Choice of hazardous jobs, environmental health risks, crime, social support

Social cohesion and equality can be categorised under macro-social health outcomes of education although, according to Feinstein, there is not yet robust causal evidence of the effect of education in achieving them.[129]

In relation to the health outcomes of adult learning:

- Adult education for low income mothers can ameliorate depression.[130]
- A sense of agency is linked to educational attainment.[131] Therefore, adult education that encourages this feature of the self can have an effect on pursuing further education, which can foster other health benefits.
- A UK study found, 33 in 1000 more adult learners taking one or two courses will quit smoking than non-learners.[132]
- The same study also found that participation in adult learning results in taking more exercise, and increases life satisfaction.

128 The strength of effects and the absolute, relative or cumulative relationships between these outcomes and learning are not presented here but are considered in Ibid.

129 Feinstein, L et al. (2006). "What are the Effects of Education on Health?" In OECD. *Measuring the Effects of Education on Health and Civic Engagement: Proceedings of the Copenhagen Symposium.* OECD: France.

130 Leininger, J.L and A. Kalil. (2008). "Cognitive and Non-Cognitive Predictors of Success in Adult Education Programs: evidence from Experimental Data with Low-Income Welfare Recipients. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management.* 27(3). 521-535.

131 Ibid.

132 Feinstein et al. (2003). *Contribution of Adult Learning to Health and Social Capital.* Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning: UK.

The documented health outcomes of community education in Ireland are set out in the table below.

Table 8.2 Health Outcomes of Community Education[133]

Level	Outcomes
Individual	Decreased isolation/ loneliness
	Decreased need for primary care services
	Personal development – resilience, valuation of the future, expectations
	Increase self-esteem/confidence
Collective	Improved personal relationships

The personal development outcomes of community education are deemed to be critical for community education as it seeks to combat the deleterious effects of discrimination, which has an impact on the self-esteem and confidence of different disadvantaged target groups such as women,[134] and early school leavers.[135] It is also necessary as a strategy for the achievement of equality in education. Where learners may have experienced the devaluing of abilities and identities in the classroom as part of the validation of dominant groups in society[136] community education has a role in valuing diversity.

The development of self-confidence through adult learning is important as it is a precursor to a belief that a learner can be successful in the learning setting. Self-confidence comes about from a person's memories of feeling that they did or could arrange and carry out tasks to achieve their goals. [137] Where individuals have experienced blocks to planning and reaching their goals, negative self-esteem results and can block further development, academic or otherwise. The development of self-confidence is central to persistence in learning.[138]

133 From a variety of sources. See for instance, WERRC. (2001). *Women at the Forefront: the Role of Women's Community Education Groups in Combating Poverty and Disadvantage.* AONTAS: Dublin.

134 See for instance. Fischer, A.R. and K.B. Holz. (2007). "Perceived Discrimination and Women's Psychological Distress: The Roles of Collective and Personal Self-Esteem." In. *Journal of Counseling Psychology.* v54 (2). p154-164.

135 Byrne, D and E. Smyth. (2009). *No Way Back the Dynamics of Early School Leaving.* ESRI: Dublin.

136 Lynch et al. 2004. *Equality: from Theory to Action.* Palgrave Macmillan: UK. 144.

137 Bandura, A. (1986). "*Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A Social Cognitive Theory,*" Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

138 Carpintieri, JD. (2008). *Persistence: Research Briefing.* NRDC: UK. 3.

Fleming and Finnegan assert a political role for the development of self-confidence in adult learning, particularly for non-traditonal students. Using the ideas of philosopher Axel Honneth, they contend that the development of self-confidence through practices of recognition is essential not just for individual development and persistence in learning, but for the development of democracy. Practices of recognition involve, "intersubjective recognition of their [individuals'] abilities and achievements."[139] In terms of how recognition contributes to functioning of democracy the authors write:

> "We need caring and loving individuals and these are produced through and by those with self-confidence. It requires good recognition of the reciprocal nature of legal rights... only a person who possesses self-respect can recognise the rights of others. And thirdly, a democratic society requires the reciprocal recognition of work, and again only a person with good levels of self-esteem can recognise the contribution of others."

In community education the tutor and other staff/volunteers are the individuals who lead this intersubjective recognition. The importance of the development of self-confidence for recognition is borne out in the Women's Community Education Quality Assurance Framework, which states that one of the goals of community education is recognition for women both for individual and collective development, "Recognition is one of the four goals of women's community education because it develops pride, confidence and ambition and makes sure achievements are acknowledged. When all groups of women are recognised, the result is that diversity is reflected and valued."[140]

From a policy perspective, personal development outcomes also demonstrate the achievement of generic skills like problem-solving, communication, and self-directed working. These are skills, which the *National Skills Strategy* emphasises as essential for a highly skilled populace.[141]

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139 Fleming, T. and F. Finnegan. (2009). "Honneth and Recognition as a Sensitising Concept for Narrative Analysis." Discussion paper presented to the EU Research Project on Access and Retention of Non-Traditional Students in Higher Education (RANLHE). URL: www.ranlhe.dsw.edu.pl/files/Honneth_and_Recognition.pdf.

140 AONTAS. (2009). *Flower Power: A Guidebook for Best Practice in Women's Community Education*. AONTAS: Dublin. 42

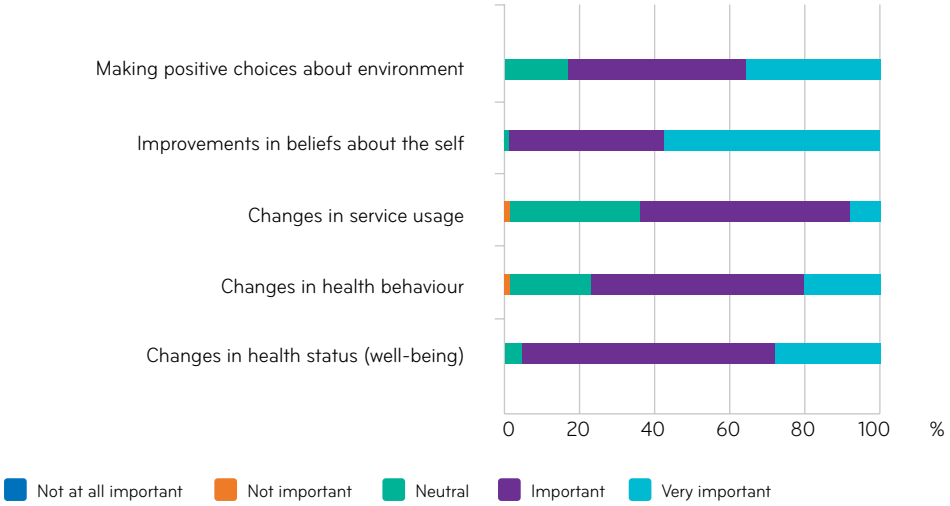
141 Expert Working Group on Future's Skills Needs. (2007). *Tomorrow's Skills: Towards a National Skills Strategy*. Expert Working Group on Future's Skills Needs: Ireland.

The research presented here sought to ascertain if community education helped learners adopt positive health behaviours or helped them achieve positive change in regard to their personal development.

RELEVANT RESULTS

VEC personnel were also asked their perceived level of importance of health outcomes for community education. They are set out in the figure below.

Figure 8.1 VEC Personnel Perceived Importance of Health Outcomes



The above figure tells us that, for the most part, VEC personnel felt that health outcomes were important for community education. Overwhelmingly they perceived changes in beliefs about the self to be important or very important (98%). They also perceived changes in health status (95%) and making choices about their environment (85%) to be important or very important. They were less sure about changes in service usage and health behaviour although a majority still felt their level of importance was at the upper end of the scale.

Personal Development and Mental Health Outcomes

We now turn to the percentage of learners who experienced positive changes in terms of the personal development or beliefs about the self outcomes asked about in the learner's survey.

Table 8.3 Percentage Positive Change Personal Development Outcomes Learners

	Large positive change	Some positive change	Total
Self confidence	39	46	85
Sense of purpose or hope	31	49	80
Happiness	40	37	77
Ability to do things by yourself	37	38	75
Ability to communicate with others	34	39	73
Quality of life	34	39	73
Ability to tackle problems rather than ignore them	31	39	70
Asking for support	31	38	69
Making decisions	26	40	66
Ability to plan for the future	24	36	60
Trust in others	32	27	59
Sense of loneliness	20	32	52
Confidence in talking to children about importance of finishing their education	29	19	48
How well you get along with your family	23	20	43
General parenting	19	23	42
Understanding rights under Irish equality law	16	24	41
Ability to help children with homework	17	19	35
Fear of being a victim of crime	12	17	29

The table above tells us that the majority of learners experienced many of the personal development outcomes above. None of the learners cited a negative change in relation to these outcomes. The top three were a positive change in self-confidence (85%), sense of purpose or hope (80%), and happiness (77%). The majority of learners also experienced positive changes in relation to other important aspects of personal development such as ability to do things by yourself (75%), ability to communicate with others (73%), quality of life (73%) and ability to tackle problems rather than ignore them (70%).

When the top three personal development outcomes are significance tested against the age, gender, educational levels and rural/urban variables the following trends emerge. Urban participants were significantly more likely than rural to cite positive changes in their sense of purpose or hope [2(1)= 15.63, $p < .001$].

The younger age groups were significantly more likely to have improved happiness [c2(3)= 13.92, $p < .05$] as a result of their community education experience.

Results were analysed to see what percentage of learners in each type of course experienced the top personal development outcomes. Results are set out in the table below.

Table 8.4 Type of Course and Top Social Personal Development Outcome

Type of Course	Top Outcome
IT/ECDL	Self-confidence (100%)
Communications/Numeracy/Writing	Self-confidence (94%)
Hobbies	Self-confidence (80%)
Language	Numbers too small to analyse
Social/Personal/Professional Development	Self-confidence (92%)
Health/First Aid	Self-confidence (100%)
Dance/Exercise/Drama/Music	Self-confidence (86%)
Social Studies	Numbers too small to be analysed
Parent/Child/Childcare	Numbers too small to be analysed

This table shows us that the main personal development outcome for most types of courses is self-confidence. Learners were also asked how participation in community education may have changed how they feel in relation to some markers of mental well-being. The results of that question are set out in the table below.

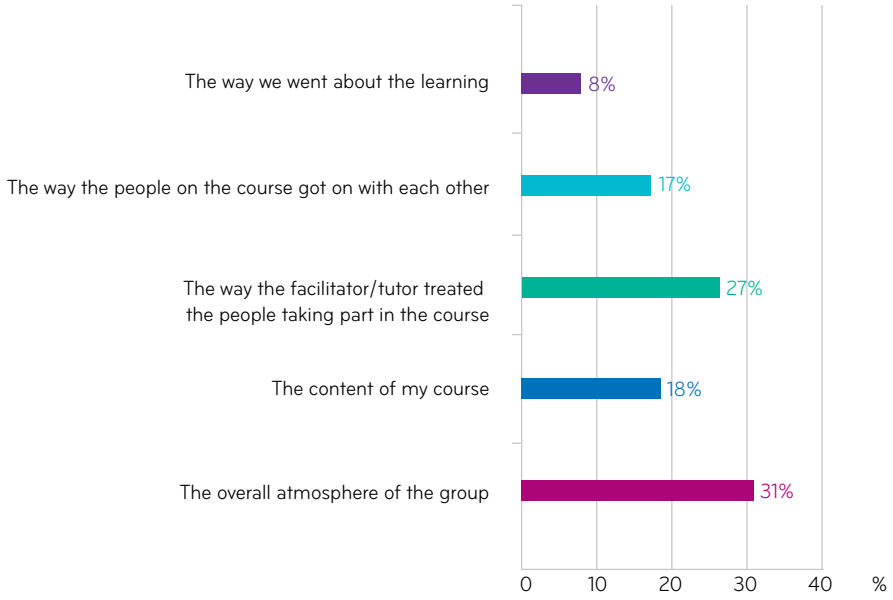
Table 8.5 How Participation Changed the Way Learners Feel about Things

Enabling Positive Change	Percentage
Do not feel they will never get a chance to succeed	97
Do not feel more pushed around in my life	93
Do not feel they cannot change many of the important things in my life	84
Feel happier and less depressed	58
More control over things that happen to them	53
Feel less anxious	43

The table above shows that for just over half the sample they feel happier and less depressed as a result of community education (58%) and they feel they have more control over things that happen to them (53%). Just over 40% indicated they feel less anxious as a result of community education.

When asked what aspect of community education assists with personal development changes the most frequently cited aspect was the overall atmosphere in the group (31%) as can be seen in figure below.

Figure 8.2 Aspect Most Useful in Enabling Positive Personal Development Outcomes



As can also be seen in the figure above the way the facilitator/ tutor treated the people taking part in the course was the second most frequently cited aspect that facilitates positive changes in relation to personal development and mental health (27%).

Qualitative Data

The strategic interviewees and interviews with case study providers and learners produced qualitative results about mental health and personal development outcomes for community education.

All of the strategic interviewees mentioned community education's role in increasing self-esteem and self-confidence: "One of the most amazing outcomes is that personal development piece that really does transform people's lives. It's much more significant than the core of any course. If it is working well you have someone who emerges at the end articulate, confident, self aware" (strategic interviewee #3).

All of the case study providers said that they aimed to achieve outcomes related to mental health and particularly, self-esteem and confidence, "I would hate if someone left here without some movement in their personal self-image" (case study provider #1).

Overwhelmingly the case study learners indicated positive personal development through community education with all but one saying they had positive changes in regard to increased self-confidence and sense of purpose or hope. One learner describes how her experience of community education allowed her to develop the skills and confidence she needed to manage when her husband suffered a major illness:

> "If I hadn't of had that education I would have been lost especially with the hospital. I found I had the courage to ask, I was able to stand my ground and say my husband wasn't ready to go home, and for form filling there was loads of red tape. He wouldn't have gotten the help he needed I was able to look for a counsellor for the kids" (present learner #4).

The majority of learners also reported positive changes in regard to tackling problems, doing things by themselves, communication, asking for support and making decisions, "I was very shy before I wouldn't talk to anyone, I got ashamed of my life. Now I feel can speak out. I can say whatever I want to say" (present learner #11).

There was also a high level of consensus from learners that they were happier as a result of community education and felt they had more control over what happened to them.

When asked what aspect of community education assisted with mental health or belief about the self changes case study learners were most likely to say the way the tutor treated people taking part in the course or the overall atmosphere in the group. This quote illustrates how the latter works to achieve personal development outcomes, "we were all in the same boat there were others that were really bad with public speaking we were so close that we all got through it" (past learner #4).

In regard to how the tutor treats people and fosters positive beliefs in the self two remarks from learners are notable:

> "If the tutors had been different and not caring I don't think I would have got as much out of the course [it] made you feel like you were an important member, made you feel you can do it" (past learner #2).

> "The tutor was really encouraging. [You] never realize that the tutor is under pressure themselves, could see its hard going to get it right so we understand that they are human and have doubts and fears like everybody else" (past learner #5).

Analysis

We can see that learners frequently cited positive changes related to personal development and mental well-being as a result of their community education experience, in particular for self-confidence, a sense of purpose or hope or happiness. However, many other personal development outcomes were frequently cited as well, showing that community education achieves much in regard to beliefs about the self for learners.

The qualitative research demonstrates that changes in relation to personal development are a focal outcome for learners and providers alike. For learners, changes, in particular, to their self-confidence were attributed to the atmosphere in the group such that they all learned from each other or felt they were all in the same boat. It was also attributed to the way the tutor treated them in the context of an encouraging, empathetic relationship.

Physical Health Outcomes

Learners were asked to indicate if they had made any changes in relation to a list of health behaviours. The results of this question are set out in the table below.

Table 8.7 Percentage Physical Health Outcomes Learner's Survey

	Yes, I did this and I feel it is a result of my community education experience	**Yes, I did this, but I do not think it is a result of my community education experience**	**No, I did not do this**
I started to exercise a bit more	46	36	18
I started to eat more fruit and veg	41	43	16
Talked to children about alcohol and drug use	29	40	32
Stopped smoking around my kids	19	28	53
Offered to drive people home after a night out	19	42	39
I started to go to the doctor more often	19	25	56
Breastfed or encouraged a friend to breastfeed	16	34	50
Drank less alcohol	16	27	57
Asked about treatment to help with an addiction	15	11	74
Went for cancer screening	15	36	49
Smoke only once in awhile instead of everyday	11	11	78
Stopped smoking	10	18	72

The top three health behaviour changes made by learners include starting to exercise a bit more (46%), starting to eat more fruit and vegetables (41%). What is notable is that only people who had children answered the question about the third top outcome. Twenty-nine percent of parents indicated that community education had motivated them to speak to their children about alcohol and drug use.

When the top three outcomes are analysed against the key demographic variables we can see that learners aged 25-44 years of age are significantly more likely to have spoken to their children about alcohol and drug abuse as a result of community education [c2(3)= 10.17, p < .05]. Learners from urban areas are also significantly more likely to have spoken to their child about alcohol and drug abuse as a result of community education [c2(1)= 9.13, p < .05].

Learners were also asked to assess their health status before community education and currently to see if their had been any impact on their overall health. The results of that question are considered in the table below.

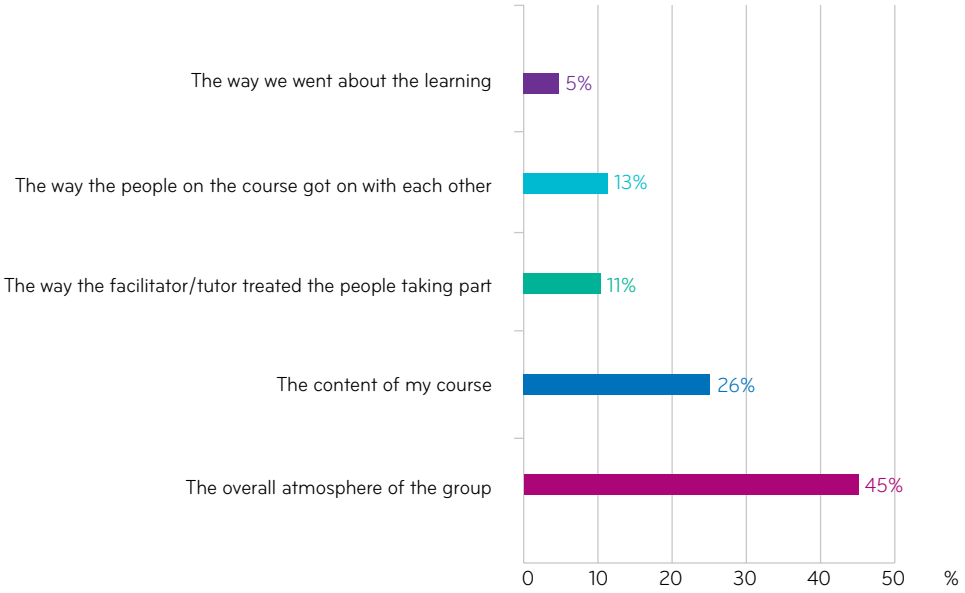
Table 8.8 Percentage General Health Before and After for Learners

General health	Percentage
Health improved	20
Health got worse	7
No change in health status	73
Total	**100**

As we can see most learners indicated that their health status had remained stable during the community education experience.

As with the other outcome areas the learners were asked to consider which aspect of community education facilitated positive health changes.

Figure 8.3 Aspect Most Useful in Enabling Changes Health Behaviours



The most useful aspect for encouraging health behaviour changes was deemed to be the overall atmosphere in the group (45%) followed by the content of courses (26%).

Qualitative Data

Only one of the strategic interviewees named physical health improvements as a result of community education. In so doing he illustrates how outcomes in community education can be linked:

> "By the same token you could have someone who comes back to community education year after year. It's a comfort zone for them. It gets them out of the house. [Like] the older man doing some history pamphlet about the area. Then you see the blood pressure went down, their levels of depression went down... they went round and told the kids about the area. So somehow that will impact on kids somewhere (strategic interviewee #2)."

Eight of the 11 case study providers indicated that they aimed to achieve outcomes related to physical health through either course content or once-off events or having literature about health promotion initiatives in house, "Yes, we try to bring everyone to the local healthy living house, run healthy food made easy [courses], stress management courses, we have offered yoga and relaxation. (case study provider #4). Other providers invited health care providers like the local public health nurse to come in and speak with learners.

Some of the case study learners indicated changes in health behaviours as a result of the community education experience, but not in terms of changes in service usage. The most often cited changes were in regard to eating more fruit and vegetables and starting to exercise a bit more. About half of the group indicated changes in these areas. One learner reflected on how community education motivated her to begin attending the gym because she suffers from chronic pain which can be better managed with exercise and meant she would not have to miss any of her classes due to her condition, "I've that bit more energy, I wouldn't have joined a gym before. I wouldn't have gone on my own before, but now I go on my own and I love it" (present learner #6). Another learner also described how she began to go to the gym because community education gave her the confidence to join whereas prior to that she would have been too shy to walk into the gym.

The aspect of community education that helps with health behaviour changes in the qualitative data was most often cited to be the content of courses, meaning that many of the case study learners had participated in courses containing some form of health curriculum.

Analysis

The results show that community education achieves limited outcomes in terms of changes in health behaviour and overall health. Mainly, learners reported that they had begun to eat more healthily and exercise more as a result of community education. Twenty-nine percent of parents, mostly from urban areas, indicated that they had talked to their children about drugs and alcohol because of their community education experience.

The qualitative data shows the linked nature of outcomes for community education. For instance, attendance at the gym was motivated by confidence attained through the learning or just not wanting to miss the course as opposed to emerging solely as a result of a fitness focus in the curriculum.

DISCUSSION

DES funded community education achieves significant outcomes in relation to personal development for learners. According to the qualitative data these outcomes are a specific focus of providers who set a high priority on learners increasing, in particular, their self-esteem and confidence, but also their ability to communicate and their assertiveness. These outcomes are deemed important in the literature, because members of disadvantaged groups, such as early school leavers have lower self-esteem than their more educationally advantaged colleagues and require the development of self-esteem as a foundation to believe in their academic efficacy.

The high frequency of experiencing personal development outcomes like positive changes in decision-making, planning and asking for support indicate that community education is meeting an aim to integrate generic skills development into learning, one that was cited as particularly important for low-skilled men. This generic skills development was also deemed important in the *National Skills Strategy*. In particular, the strategy emphasises the targeting of the low skilled and disadvantaged for upskilling.

Would learners in other types of adult learning in Ireland similarly experience these personal development outcomes? It is impossible to know without comparative research. However, what we can see is that these outcomes emerge from an open classroom environment and a relationship of empathy and encouragement from the tutor. This type of learning environment is attributed to community education. Therefore, it is likely that if these outcomes were to be achieved in other settings similar conditions would need to be created, particularly for the groups of learners with whom community education providers work.

It is notable that none of the learners in the sample experienced negative change in relation to the personal development outcomes showing that community education learners are held in high esteem in the learning setting regardless of their sex, age, gender, ethnicity or educational background.

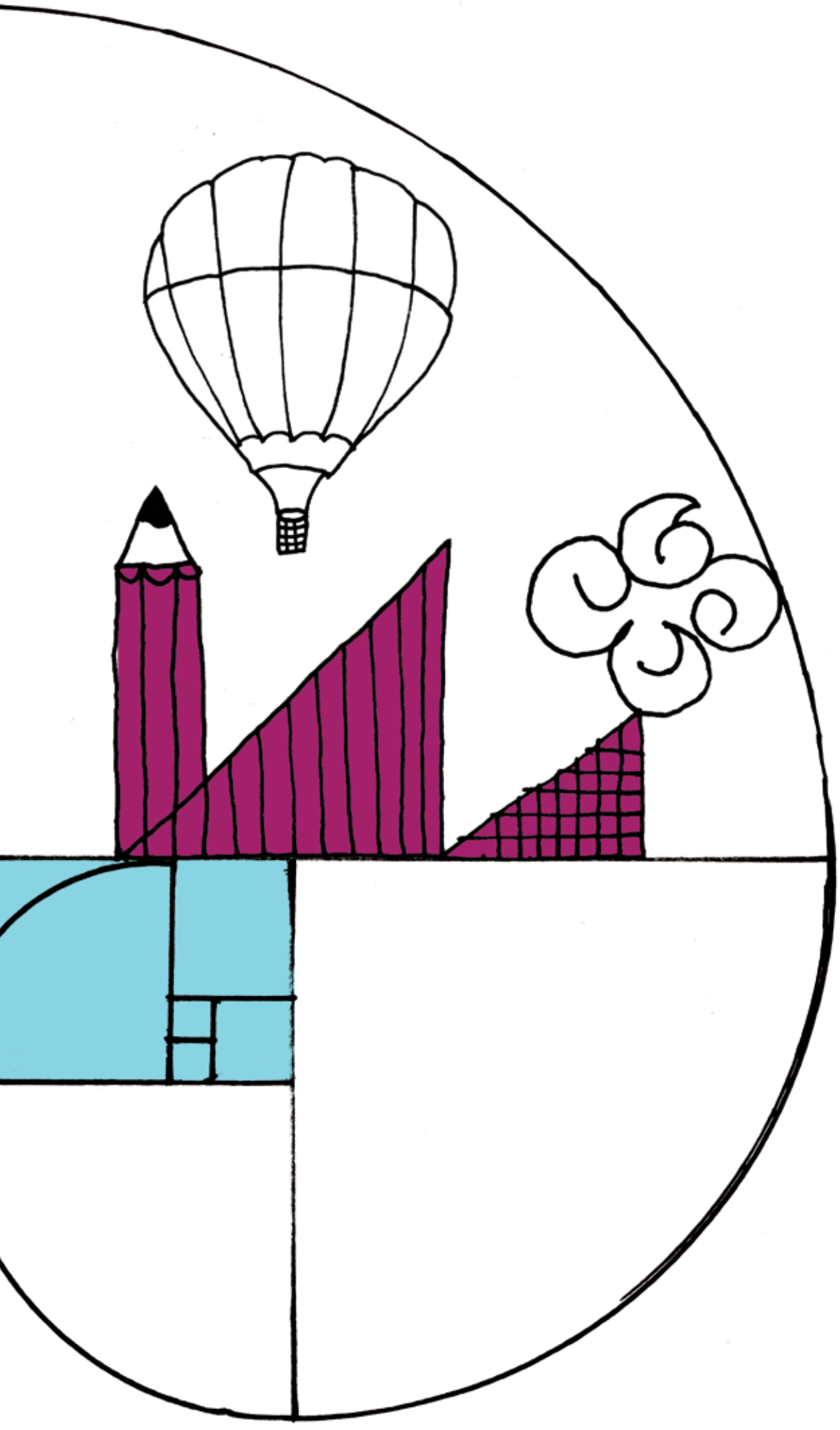
In this chapter and in Chapter Four we have seen that in community education the tutors and their peers are the agents for the intersubjective recognition of learners' positive skills and qualities. According to the literature this recognition is essential not just for persistence in learning, but to develop individuals who can participate in a healthy functioning democracy, and for the promotion of equality.

Health outcomes were not as frequently cited by learners but community education does have a limited impact in regard to healthier eating and exercise, again linked to the atmosphere in the group where learners bolster each others' confidence and learn from each other.

To a large degree, both VEC personnel and case study providers indicated that they saw a change in health behaviours as appropriate for community education. In particular, case study providers described how they integrated health related activities into the curriculum, had printed health information onsite or had links with local health services or projects. Again, we are reminded that just over half of the case study providers are funded through the BTEI Community Strand. This finding could mean that providers in this strand of funding are more likely to engage in the integration of health related activities than in the ALCES funded community education represented in the survey sample.

As in the last chapter the question arises: to what extent would we like to see health related outcomes for community education? If providers would like to see outcomes related to physical health cited more frequently then this type of learning would need to be integrated into more community education opportunities. However, the impact of these outcomes should not be underestimated. For instance, if we estimate that 46% of community education learners nationally began to adopt healthier eating habits as a result of their community education experience then that means that 25,629 learners made this change, which is a significant number of individuals.[142]

142 This figure is derived by calculating 46% of the national figure for learners (N=55,716). Assumes that 46% of learners nationally would experience this outcome since the sample of learners for the survey was representative.



9 WHAT ARE THE PROGRESSION OUTCOMES OF COMMUNITY EDUCATION?

[Community education is] offering the best quality education in a community setting with an emphasis on opportunities for employment, but an appreciation of the social and mental health benefits (case study provider #5).

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the results of the research about the further education and training and labour market progression outcomes for community education as gleaned from the learner's survey, VEC personnel survey and the qualitative data from the strategic interviews and case studies.

The main findings from this chapter are:

- The primary progression goals for community education learners are learning a new skill (70%) or doing a non-certified course with this group or centre (55%).
- However, for half the sample attaining accreditation through their group was important.
- Accreditation is more important to learners than providers and VEC personnel reported in the research. Almost half (48%) felt they should receive accreditation every time they did a community education course. This desire could be linked to learners perceiving community education as functional adult education in their communities rather than education for collective development. It may also be linked to the desire for those with low educational qualifications to accrue educational advantage regardless of the type of learning engaged in.
- The research points strongly to the need for learners engaged in ALCES funded community education to have the option of gaining certification.
- Learners employ multiple concepts of progression to define their journey in community education as opposed to just one although the results were slightly more in favour for the concept of progression that is about maintenance of well-being (40%).
- This concept of progression is important in community education. Providers perceived attaining equilibrium as an essential precursor to other types of progression.

BACKGROUND

There is no doubt that there is a direct link between education, income level and labour market progression, particularly in the achievement of qualifications that can help individuals' attain employment or higher wages, or that education can create motivation to pursue further learning. One study of the economic value of adult and community education in New Zealand estimated participation in adult learning resulted in an average of $11,700 – $15,500 added value over the individual's lifetime.[143]

The documented progression outcomes for community education are set out in the table below.

Table 9.1 Progression Outcomes for Community Education[144]

	Economic
Individual	Progression to further education, training or employment
Collective	Wider employment in the community – particularly in community, childcare and local education sectors Increase in community infrastructure (groups building and owning own property)

A Note on Progression

A wider view on the concept of progression allow us to show how adult learning can have long-term impacts, but that those impacts may not emerge in a linear way and may have wider benefits than educational or labour market progression. Vorhaus proposes that progression be distinguished in these ways[145]:

- Progression – involves moving along one dimension, i.e. moving from a FETAC Level 5 award in childcare to a Level 6 in childcare management.
- Development – moving forward along two, not necessarily related dimensions, i.e. learners may engage in learning, then disengage and then jump back into a something unrelated to what they did before. This experimentation is essential for educationally disadvantaged learners to gain confidence. Ultimate progression may take time to emerge so this category helps to acknowledge where some kind of forward motion is taking place.

143 Pricewatercooper. (2008). *Adult and Community Education: an Economic Evaluation of Adult and Community Education Outcomes.* PWC: New Zealand.

144 For instance see Galligan. C. (2008). *Community Education and Social Change: qualitative Research Exploring the Nature of Community Education in Donegal.* County Donegal VEC: Ireland

145 Vorhaus, T. (2000). "Learning Outcomes in a Non-accredited Curriculum: a View from the Adult Education Sector." In Jones, H and Mace, J eds. *Outcomes of Learning: taking the Debate Forward.* Further Education Development Agency: UK.

- Equilibrium – working actively to stay at the same level of competence, i.e. older learners who are retired regularly attending some form of learning to maintain well-being.

Galligan's study about community education in Donegal found that all of the community education learner research participants had moved on after participation in their first programme.[146] They defined progression in the same way proposed by Vorhaus as progression (to more education/ training), development (to a community group or other channel to personal development), and equilibrium (maintaining themselves at the same level). The same study also found that accreditation is important for those participants who have limited qualifications and that they were "frustrated about the lack of progression through community education."[147] This gap was perceived resulting from a lack of co-ordination between programmes, and a need for guidance support to help participants identify further options.

The central role of educational guidance for adult learners, in particular, for the progression of disadvantaged learners is acknowledged in *Towards 2016* and the *National Skills Strategy*. The Adult Education Guidance Initiative, co-ordinated by the National Centre for Guidance in Education is responsible for providing guidance to adults in community education, adult literacy and Vocational Training and Opportunities Scheme services provided by the VEC. Each VEC has its own Adult Education Guidance Service. A recent evaluation of the Initiative indicated significant regional variation in targeting of community education clients by these services, particularly BTEI clients.[148]

Progression and support of learners should be encouraged through an integrated response at VEC level involving the guidance service, adult literacy service, education providers and partnership agencies.[149]

146 Galligan. C. (2008). *Community Education and Social Change: qualitative Research Exploring the Nature of Community Education in Donegal.* County Donegal VEC: Ireland.

147 Ibid. 81.

148 Eustace, A. and S. Phillips. (2010). *Overarching Research on the Adult Education Guidance Initiative 2000-2006*. National Centre for Guidance in Education. Ireland.

149 Also see Further Education Development Unit. *BTEI: Certification Matters – Guidelines to Support Certification Outcomes in BTEI Funded Programmes*. FEDU: Dublin.

Certification

As indicated in the introduction to the report, certification of adult learning is recognised in accordance with the National Framework of Qualifications. Programmes funded under the BTEI Community Strand must lead to certification in modules or awards on the Framework. There is no such guideline for ALCES funded community education. A recent guide on certification for the Back to Education Initiative emphasised the importance of 'taster' courses or preparation for learners to determine if they were ready for certified learning.[150]

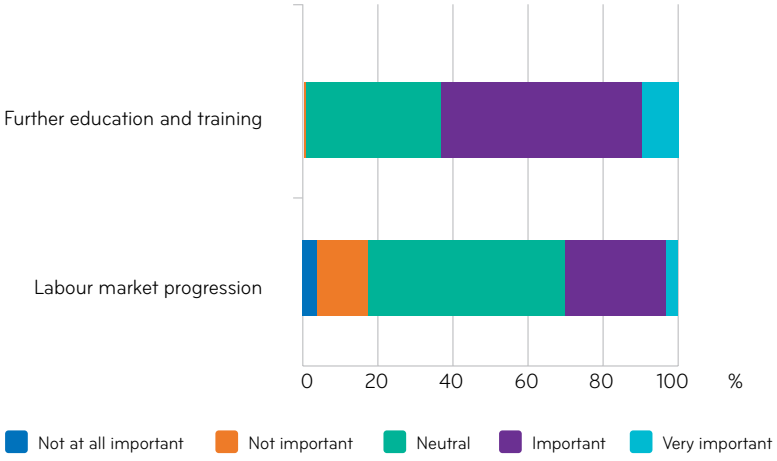
RELEVANT RESULTS

This section presents results from the VEC personnel and learner survey in relation to progression outcomes for community education. Qualitative feedback from the strategic interviews, learner case studies and provider interviews supplement those results.

Progression to Further Education, Training and the Labour Market

VEC personnel were asked to indicate the perceived level of importance of progression outcomes for community education. The results are set out in the figure below.

Figure 9.1 VEC Personnel Perceived Importance of Progression Outcomes



150 Ibid.

Personnel felt that progression to further education and training was an important or very important outcome of community education (64%), but were undecided about labour market progression, as over half (56%) were neutral about the importance of this outcome. It is of note, that these two outcome areas were the ones that personnel perceived to be least important when compared against the outcomes explored in the last two chapters.

When asked their level of agreement to the statement, "community education is about learners bridging from non-formal to more formal learning with the ultimate goal of accessing the labour market," 43% of personnel neither or agreed nor disagreed, while 48% disagreed or strongly disagreed to the statement.

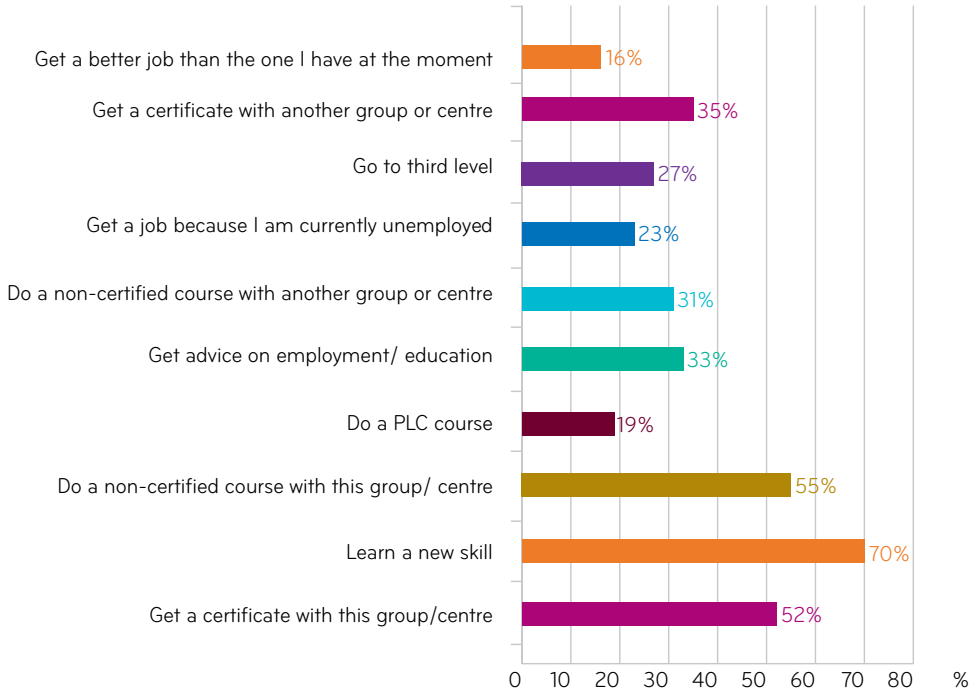
The table below sets out the results for questions from the learner's survey that pertains to progression outcomes. Learners did not answer questions relating to these outcomes consistently so the number of respondents who answered the question is given next to the relevant outcome.

Table 9.2 Percentage Progression Outcomes Learner's Survey

	Yes, I want to do this and think that this group can help me to do it	I have already done this as a result of coming to this group	Total % for current provider	Yes, I want to do this, but do not think this group can help me to do it
Get a certificate with this group/ centre (n=352)	75	15	90	10
Learn a new skill (n=481)	81	10	91	9
Do a non-certified course w/this group/centre (n=377)	75	16	91	9
Do a PLC course (n=129)	78	6	84	16
Get advice on employment/ education (n=223)	75	7	82	19
Do a non-certified course with another group or centre (n=212)	67	14	81	19
Get a job because I am unemployed (n=160)	72	7	79	21
Go to third level (n=181)	70	8	78	23
Get a certificate with another group/ centre(N=240)	66	11	77	23
Get a better job than the one I have at the moment (N=108)	66	3	69	31

The figure below shows the results from the table above when 'yes' answers are shown as a percentage of the 683 learners who completed the survey.

Figure 9.2 Percentage Total Sample Progression Outcomes for Learners[151]



The top three progression outcomes resulting from community education for learners was learn a new skill (70%), do a non-certified course with this group or centre (55%) and get a certificate with this group or centre (52%). Levels of actual achievement of progression goals were low. Therefore, learners were, for the most part, thinking about future goals they felt they wanted to achieve as a result of their community education experience.

When the top three goals are tested for significance against the gender, age, education levels and rural/urban variables the only trend of note was that men were less likely to indicate that they wanted to learn a new skill [$c2(1)= 4.24$, $p < .05$].

Results were analysed to see the percentage of learners in each type of course experiencing the top three outcomes. The findings are in the table below.

151 These percentages are an aggregate of the affirmative responses for each outcome.

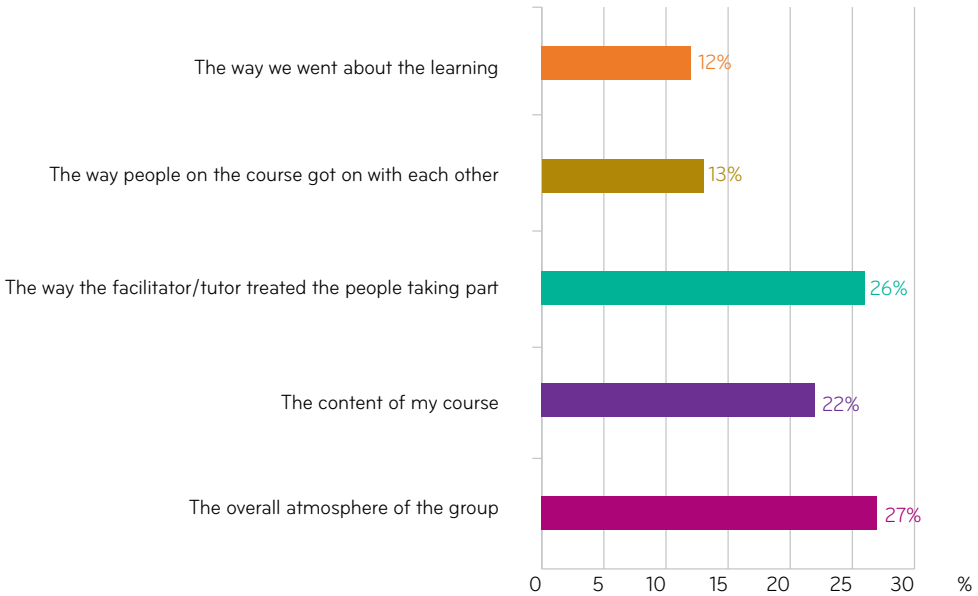
Table 9.3 Type of Course and Top Progression Outcome

Type of Course	Top Outcome
IT/ECDL	Do a non-certified course with this group/ centre (76%)
Communications/ Numeracy/ Writing	Learn a new skill (70%)
Hobbies	Learn a new skill (77%)
Language	Numbers too small to analyse
Social/ Personal/ Professional Development	Learn a new skill (84%)
Health/ First Aid	Learn a new skill (94%)
Dance/ Exercise/ Drama/ Music	Learn a new skill (76%)
Social Studies	Numbers too small to analyse
Parent/ Child/ Childcare	Numbers too small to analyse

The table shows us that learn a new skill is the main outcome for most types of courses except for IT/ECDL where the most frequently experienced outcome was to do a non-certified course with this group/ centre.

When asked to indicate which aspect of community education facilitated progression goals the two aspects most frequently cited were the overall atmosphere in the group (27%) and the tutor (26%) as can be seen in the figure below.

Figure 9.3 Most Useful in Enabling Positive Changes for Progression



The content of courses also seemed to play an important role in development of progression goals for 22% of learners.

Qualitative Data

The majority of strategic interviewees and case study providers indicated that progression to further education and training was relevant to community education. They were less likely to name labour market progression as an outcome of community education. Of relevance to these outcomes are the views of case study learners. Most had already engaged in accredited learning with their provider. The most often cited goals were to learn a new skill, do another non-certified course with this group or centre or do another certified course at another centre.

When asked what aspect of community education assisted learners to reach further education, training or employment goals learners were most likely to say the content of their course or the way they went about the learning, illustrating that for them it is the skills acquisition that allows people to progress to these goals.

Analysis

The results show that involvement in community education does motivate learners to continue with learning in the form of learning a new skill (experienced by 70% of learners), doing a non-certified course with their centre (55%) or doing a certified course with their group or centre (52%). Of note is that a third of the sample were interested in attending another provider or getting advice on employment or education. The data suggests that, while not a primary focus, progression to further education and training in the form of certified learning can be achieved through community education since it was desired by half the learners. It also suggests that for a third of the sample they wish to investigate their progression options through educational and career guidance.

Concepts of Educational Progression

Both VEC personnel and learners were asked to complete questions that ascertained their level of agreement to each of the three concepts of progression set out by Vorhaus.

Progression along one dimension VEC Personnel were asked their level of agreement to two statements pertaining to this concept of progression with conflicting results. When asked if learners should always progress upward to a higher level of education along the same dimension, most of the sample disagreed or disagreed strongly to the statement (75%). When they were asked if "Community education is like a ladder, and each rung

climbed helps the learner to move closer to their goals," 74% indicated that they agreed or agreed strongly to this statement.

Twenty-eight percent of learners indicated that community education was about the statement in the learner's survey pertaining to this type of progression, which was "[Community education] is like a ladder where at each rung I feel supported and safe enough to move up the next rung and get closer to my goals."

Progression as development VEC personnel were asked three statements which aimed to assess their agreement to this concept of progression in community education. Ninety-eight percent of the personnel agreed or agreed strongly that "Community education is like a journey where sometimes the learner take breaks or changes direction but each leg of the trip teaches them something new regardless of the final destination." A further 85% agreed or agreed strongly that dipping in and out of learning in community education is essential. Sixty-percent placed themselves in the upper points of the scale in relation to the statement, "experimentation and following a non-linear path is essential."

Thirty two percent of learners chose the statement in the survey describing this type of progression as the one which best fit their assessment of community education, "Community education is like a journey where sometimes the learner take breaks or changes direction, but each leg of the trip teaches them something new regardless of the final destination."

Progression as equilibrium Three statements gauged personnel's level of agreement to this concept of progression. They were asked if, "more than anything, community education should provide individuals with an opportunity to maintain their well-being." Seventy-five percent of personnel agreed or agreed strongly to this statement.

However, 98% placed themselves in the lower end of the scale in relation to the statement, "learning should primarily focus on helping individuals to stay at the same level of competence." Seventy-two percent disagreed or disagreed strongly that, "community education is more about helping individuals to maintain their skills than progression or development."

Forty percent of learners chose the statement relating to this concept of progression as the one that described community education for them: "[Community education] is a space for me to go, where I can connect with others and look after myself."

Qualitative Data

The strategic interviewees and case study providers were all asked to define progression. Themes emerging from an analysis of their responses are set and illustrated below.

Progression is multi-faceted

None of the strategic interviewees or case study providers indicated that progression for community education learners was confined to one concept of progression. In fact, they all named two or more forms of progression as appropriate for community education. Only one strategic interviewee described progression as solely about further education and training or employment, because progression is strictly defined by the programme they co-ordinate. The multi-faceted nature of progression in community education is illustrated by the quote from a strategic interviewee, "It could be progressing onto the NFQ it could be just simply taking their lives up another ladder in a whole range of ways, in a hobby area in the way they can be better in their families, in their communities, in their workplaces… where the mind is opened up to learning and exploring new possibilities" (strategic interviewee #6).

The forms of progression mentioned in the qualitative data included progression up the NFQ, increase in confidence or soft skills, moving into another community group or leadership role, personal development and progression to the labour market.

Progression is learner-defined

Three of the strategic interviewees and two of the case studies expressed the view that progression should be about what the learner wants themselves, as highlighted in the quote from a case study provider below:

> "We would identify with learners at the beginning why they want to do what they are doing… Objectives are often underambitious… or not clear and can change and do change. If learner has had a good experience with you if a learner has had… that is often the point at which things change for them in terms of using learning or personal ambitions or a family project… or taking on severe problems. Its not up to us to say what progression is… If we are broadly meeting the learner needs in terms of going wherever they want to go. I know that mightn't be terribly popular… that you can demonstrate both quantifiable and qualitative outcomes. Somebody could start a course and say I want to do [for this reason] and then they could start relating to people and they can see they pitched themselves too low" (case study provider #1).

The importance of equilibrium

Almost all of the interviewees mentioned personal development and achieving mental well-being as progression for community education learners. This way of viewing progression is similar to concept of equilibrium set out by Vorhaus above. Interviewees spoke about how community education allows the development of skills and confidence that learners may not have had prior to engagement and that these skills are the foundation to other types of progression:

> "It works two ways there is academic progression, go from level 3 to level 5 and then to Liberties college. [There is] another. Someone arrives in painfully shy and then begins to ask questions and then begins to come in for a cup of coffee... If that doesn't happen the other won't happen. That's progression" (case study provider #9).

In other words the qualitative data articulates a view of learners that would not have been experiencing equilibrium prior to community education, but that it is a state that can be achieved through it.

Analysis

The data set out in this section shows that concept of progression emphasised by learners in community education is one about equilibrium and maintenance of well-being. The popularity of this concept may be due to the significant amount of older people in the sample. What emerges from the views of providers and personnel is that this type of progression is important because learners may not have been experiencing well-being or equilibrium prior to their involvement in community education. VEC personnel did not think that learners should remain at the same level of development as a result of community education.

However, the views of learners did illustrate that the concept of progression is multi-faceted since roughly a third of the sample chose the other two concepts of progression as describing community education. This result shows that no one concept of progression is aligned to community education for learners and that they define it for themselves.

Certification

Both learners and VEC personnel were asked about whether or not every time a learner does a community education course it should result in a certificate from an awarding body such as FETAC or the National University of Ireland. A comparison of their responses is set out below.

Table 9.4 Accreditation for Community Education

	Yes (%)	No (%)
Learners	48	52
VEC Personnel	10	90

This table shows that for almost half the sample receiving certification for community education would be valued. This frequency is at odds with the views of VEC personnel. Only 10% of them indicated that participation in community education courses should always result in certification.

Learners were also asked about their levels of knowledge of FETAC and the National Framework of Qualifications since these systems govern the accreditation of learning up to Level 5. Learners' awareness and knowledge of FETAC is set out in the table below.

Table 9.5 Percentage Learner Knowledge of FETAC

FETAC	Has heard of FETAC	Knows what FETAC is
	Percentage	Percentage
No	21	21
Yes	79	79
Total	**100**	**100**

The table indicates that learners' awareness and knowledge of FETAC is quite high. Compare these rates to their awareness and knowledge of the framework below.

Table 9.6 Percentage Learner Knowledge of NFQ

NFQ	Has heard of NFQ	Knows what NFQ is (N=361)
	Percentage	Percentage
No	67	52
Yes	33	48
Total	**100**	**100**

Respondents only completed the question related to knowing about National Framework of Qualifications if they answered yes to having heard about the framework. The results show that while 48% of the people who had heard about the framework knew what it was, this rate reflects only 25% of the whole sample.

Qualitative Data

Both strategic interviewees, case study providers and learners were asked to give their views on whether or not participation in community education programmes should always result in accreditation for the learner.

All those asked responded favourably to the provision of accreditation for community education. However, the majority of interviewees and case study providers indicated a flexible approach to accrediting community education programmes that took into account learner needs. Learner needs were defined as the expressed desire from the learner for certification from an awarding body or an assessment on the part of the provider as to whether or not the learner group doing a course was ready to take on the requirements of accredited learning:

> "I am not sure that offering accreditation initially is always the right way in... It depends on the environment or class. [For] example if you even attempted to even offer a lower than Level 5 childcare at the moment no chance... We have bridge classes... They are no more interested in accreditation. I think some people can often start a programme... will come forward and say I am definitely not interested in accreditation... and yet you want to see the level of pride in people especially people with no formal certification at all" (case study provider #1).

In other words, this group of research participants indicated that provider should be left with the choice to offer certification and supplying it should not be required.

However, two of the strategic interviewees indicated that there should always be the potential for community education learners to receive accreditation, particularly from at the lower levels of the NFQ, "All community education should have potential for gaining certification in it. Given that we have levels one to four, because they are there, don't see why they shouldn't gain certification for anything they participate in" (strategic interviewee #4). For these two interviewees the choice to gain accreditation or not should be left to the participant.

For some providers it was important to offer accreditation for community education because they felt that it should be possible to gain certification outside more formal education provision, "would hate to see that you could only get accreditation in VECs or schools" (case study provider #4).

Much of the qualitative data highlighted as with the last quote, the importance of certification for those learners who had little or no qualifications.

Fifteen out of the 22 case study learners felt that accreditation should be gained every time a learner did a programme. The importance of accreditation was generally articulated in terms of the fact that it offered proof that the learner had completed the course, but also gave pride and motivation, "yes [should get accreditation] its what pushes you on, you wouldn't be as determined, by getting the cert it gives you a goal to work to" (present learner #4).

Those who felt that a learner did not need to be accredited every time they did a course reflected that learning for fun did not need to be certified.

It is notable that many of the learners who felt that accreditation should be achieved for every course were those who had left school early, showing that it is important for this cohort of learners.

FETAC and the NFQ

Strategic interviewees were asked to comment on the high levels of knowledge about FETAC and low levels of knowledge about the NFQ exhibited by the learner's survey respondents. The majority reflected that part of the reason for the high levels of knowledge about FETAC was as a result of the advertising and promotion done by FETAC as well as the increased provision of FETAC accreditation on the ground. Many then said that less national promotion of the NFQ has taken place and less work has been done by providers to show how FETAC fits into a system of qualifications and that is why knowledge of the NFQ is so low. Many also agreed that it would be helpful for learners to understand the NFQ, "I think it would be helpful to realize that there is this kind of ladder 1 to 10 and this is connected to a similar ladder in Europe and that a qualification on this ladder gives them mobility" (strategic interviewee #6).

Analysis

The data illustrates a dissonance between providers' and personnel's perception of the appropriateness of certification for community education learners. About half the sample want certification by an awarding body every time they do a community education course. The high levels of awareness of FETAC in the sample can in part, explain this desire. Another reason for this desire is that for learners with lower educational levels the value of certification is high.

The qualitative data shows that providers' perceive accreditation is important, but it must be offered sensitively and flexibly depending on the learner's needs.

DISCUSSION

The results show that community education does seem to create the desire for further learning evidenced by the number of people who said that they wanted to learn a new skill and thought their provider could help them do it.

About half of the sample indicated an interest in doing a certified course with their group or centre and that a learner should always receive accreditation when they do a community education course.

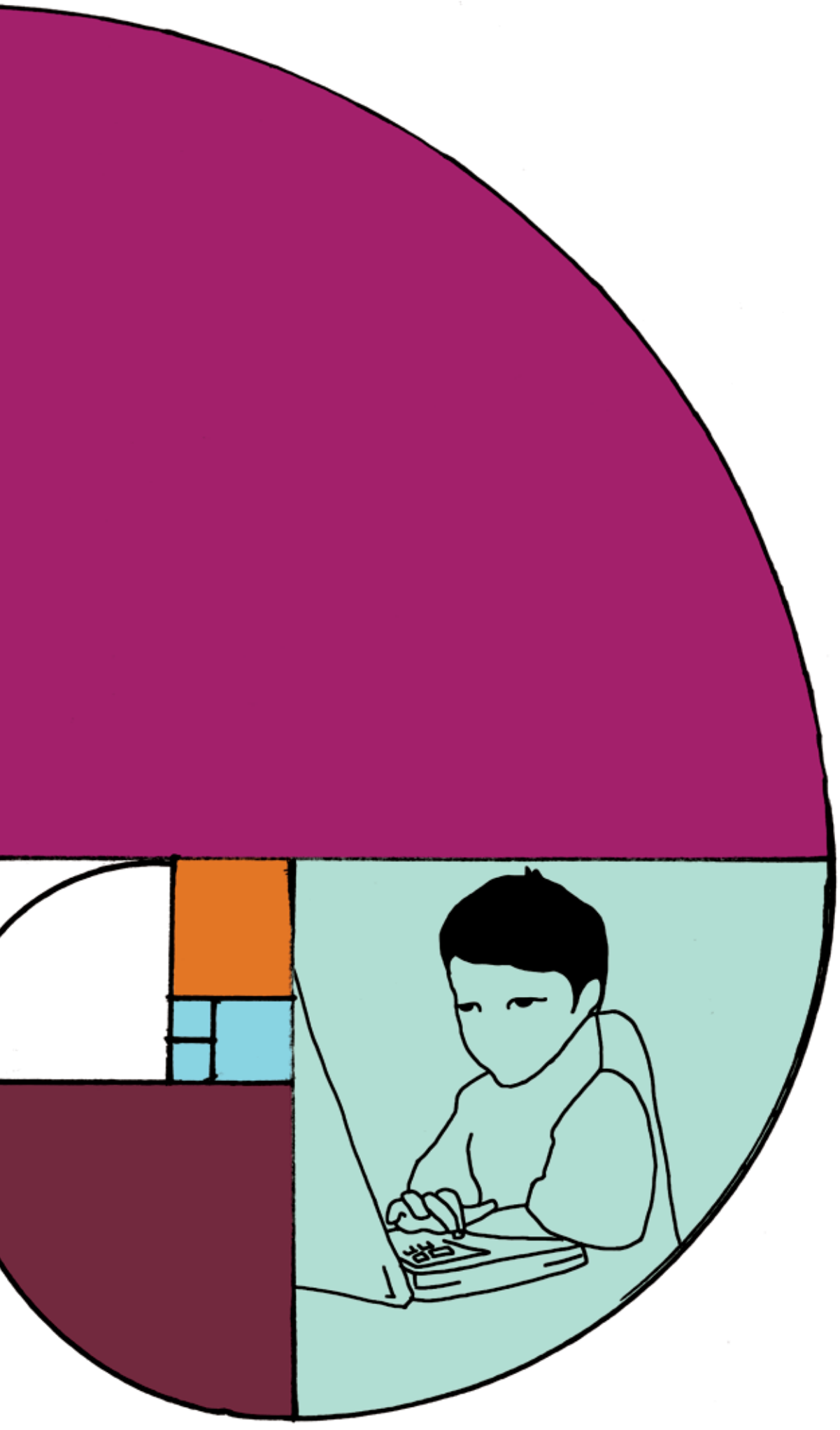
A key learning from these results is that accreditation may be more important to learners involved in ALCES funded community education than providers and personnel previously thought and that it could be of benefit to ensure that learners can avail of it if they want to. The data shows that many learners wish to pursue goals with their current provider which means that it could be important for those providers to be able to provide a range of learning opportunities for their learners including certified and non-certified learning,

There are two possible reasons for this emerging desire for certification through community education. The first is that learners may see community education as functional adult education in their community as opposed to a process for collective development. The second reason is that certification is perceived by the educationally disadvantaged learners as a strategy for equality in education so that they can accrue educational advantage.

According to the literature community education providers, and adult guidance and literacy services need to work together to meet the needs of those learners requiring support around certification and educational progression.

Of note is that knowledge of the NFQ is low and interviewees felt it would be useful for people to understand what the framework is and how FETAC accreditation fits into it.

We also learned that learners' aligned themselves with all three concepts of progression, showing they choose concepts, which match their own needs and goals for learning. Progression as equilibrium was slightly more emphasised than the other concepts showing community education's unique role in assisting individuals to attain well-being.



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[Community education is about] offering courses to people in the community second chance education, responding to the needs of the community in a family orientated way. [It] can offer childcare, help and counseling a more holistic opportunity. If we were offering courses purely driven by accreditation we wouldn't be able to put in the effort to the personal and social development of the learner... Softer skills are a real element of community education (case study 2).

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter we take the data presented in the previous chapters and assess the impact of community education at national level by analysing the findings in relation to an equality framework. We also cautiously attempt some aggregates of some of the outcomes of community education to begin to point to some indicators for community education that would need further testing.

The main points in this chapter are:

- Community education has the potential to make a significant impact towards equality at a national level by engaging many disadvantaged learners in educational opportunities.
- It works towards equality by fostering outcomes that help individuals to form relationships of love, care and solidarity such as making new friends, and becoming more likely to intervene in situations that threaten community cohesion like anti-social behaviour. It also strengthens family cohesion.
- It also works towards equality by fostering outcomes that create relationships of respect and recognition between citizens such as increasing levels of trust and tolerance.
- These outcomes show that community education can help VECs promote equality, which is a legislative requirement for them.
- Community education represents value for money for DES as even with conservative estimates, learners who start to volunteer as a result of community education provide a high return of 28.8 million to the State and a low return of 9.1 million per annum.
- The role of research in the provision of community education could be strengthened. In order to enhance this role a cultural shift needs to happen from the Departmental level to VECs, to providers and practitioners. This cultural shift would involve the valuing of evidence-based practice and decision-making. Improved data collection could help DES and the VECs carry out equality impact assessments of provision.

BACKGROUND

The Possible Micro and Macro-Social Outcomes of Adult Learning

It is not possible for this study to define macro-social outcomes for community education, because illuminating the macro-social benefits of education involves modelling using time series data longitudinally and evaluation methods that look at the effect of, for instance, a national social programme on targeted social outcomes.[152]

Before we begin to cautiously consider the impact of community education at a national level in Ireland the following points are salient:

- Conclusions about wider benefits of learning must be taken cautiously as just because an outcome is aggregated nationally it may not take into consideration the effect of socio-economic status and educational advantage and how benefit might accrue disproportionately to those who are advantaged.
- The categories of outcomes are not wholly separate and can interact with each other. For instance, engaging in a CSE outcome like joining a community group can also result in health outcomes, or an increase in self-esteem can lead to further engagement in social networks.
- Studies caution that it is difficult to control for the idea that the choice to pursue further learning may indicate that participating individuals have higher motivation than those who do not engage in adult learning. Again, caution must be used in making generalisations about learning outcomes to the general adult population.[153]

Part of the difficulty in assessing the impact of community education is the lack of data available on it, although work is ongoing to develop improved data collection. Currently, DES keeps returns on ALCES funded community education and the BTEI Community Strand. Those returns track demographic data (age, employment status and gender), numbers of learners in target groups, certification rates, numbers of learners availing of supports and length of time in the scheme as opposed to the wider benefits of learning.

152 Ibid.

153 Feinstein et al. (2003). *Contribution of Adult Learning to Health and Social Capital.* Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning: UK.

VECs are empowered through the 2001, VEC Act to assess whether or not they are performing economically, effectively and efficiently. Monitoring and evaluation tracks indicators of these operational facets for organisations. How VECs track educational outcomes varies with no standard database in use nationally.

The introduction to this report named clear rationale for tracking the widest benefits of learning, including the need to make visible learning's contribution to democracy and the achievement of equality, demonstrating value for money of state investment across public policy arenas and addressing gaps in research. A key aspect of carrying out equality impact assessments is data gathering on the impact of programmes on and experience of groups covered in the nine grounds of the Equality Legislation (see section 10.2.2 below).

The Adult Education Guidance Initiative is one DES programme in which some of the wider benefits of engagement with the service are tracked, such as changes in personal effectiveness or decision-making knowledge.[154]

A Framework for Equality

As the aim of the research is to try and assess the contribution of community education to a more just, fair and prosperous Ireland, it is necessary to present exactly what that might mean. Obviously, there is debate about this vision and a full examination of those debates is beyond the scope of this review. For the purposes of this review this vision is presented as a vision of equality in Ireland with justice, fairness and prosperity as dimensions of an equality framework. Data will be analysed in relation to this framework.

Baker et al. say of equality:

> "Perhaps what is really involved in basic equality is the idea that every human being deserves some basic minimum of concern and respect, placing at least some limits on what it is to treat someone as a human being... there will always be major inequalities between people in their status, resources, work and power. The role of the idea of equality is to provide a fair basis for managing these inequalities, by strengthening the minimum to which everyone is entitled and using equality of opportunity to regulate the competition for advantage."[155]

154 Eustace, A. and S. Phillips. (2010). *Overarching Research on the Adult Education Guidance Initiative 2000-2006*. National Centre for Guidance in Education. Ireland.

155 Baker, J. et al. (2004). *Equality from Theory to Action*. Palgrave Macmillan: UK. 23-25.

They point out that proponents of equality vary in terms of the minimum to which every individual should have the right. They propose five dimensions of equality set out below. An example is offered of an Irish policy pertaining to each dimension, but these examples are not exhaustive.

1. Respect and recognition: universal citizenship, toleration and the private sphere
This dimension refers to being able to relate to each other as equals, with respect and tolerance, when interacting as citizens regardless of differences between us. An example of an Irish policy that has goals in relation to this dimension would be the *National Action Plan Against Racism.* The role of education in this dimension is to instill pride in difference and to model relationships of respect.

2. Resources: Poverty relief and the difference principle This dimension is about the equal distribution of resources, such as wealth and income. The boldest principle in relation to this facet of equality is that societies should bring those worst off as close to the best off as possible, rather than just ensuring that everyone is above the poverty line. Ireland would not ascribe to this principle, but would express its goals in relation to this dimension through *The National Action Plan for Social Inclusion (NAPSInc).* The role of education for this principle is to ensure that those with the least resources are given the best education that can help them achieve an adequate quality of life.

3. Love, care and solidarity: a private affair This dimension refers to equal entitlement to relations of love, care and solidarity and the valuing of work done to foster this feature. It potentially refers to policies that foster the creation of strong social networks and positive family relationships, which in turn promote well-being. The Government's approach to this sphere can be seen in the Commission on the Family's *Strengthening Families for Life.* The role of education here is to acknowledge that teachers are engaged in emotional relationships that, "can have far-ranging effects, particularly on students capacities to engage in relations of love, care and solidarity."[156]

4. Power relations: civil and personal rights and liberal democracy This dimension is, at the basic level, about civil and personal rights, but it is also about equal participation in the democratic process through voting and seeking to influence public policy. Some of Ireland's goals in relation to this dimension can be seen in the *Task Force on Active Citizenship Report.* The role of education in this dimension is to teach about the enactment of citizenship rights and responsibilities and to encourage critical reflection.

156 Ibid. 144.

5. Working and learning: occupational and educational equal opportunity This dimension refers to equal access to work and education or equality of opportunity to achieve a basic level of education, but also refers to the equality of the conditions experienced in these contexts. Employment legislation and *NAPSInc* would articulate the State's commitment to equality of opportunity and condition in this dimension One role of education in this principle is to offer high quality learning environments for those with educational disadvantage, so that they can have educational opportunities.

This research shows outcomes for community education that can promote equality across these specific five dimensions with members of disadvantaged groups in Irish society.

Equality Legislation

Ireland also maintains a commitment to equality through legislation that attempts to broker equality of condition and opportunity in relation to access to goods and services, employment, vocational opportunities, collective agreements and advertising along nine grounds.[157] While this legislation does not work to fully legally enshrine a minimum of equality across all the dimensions above it makes an important statement about which groups are considered to be marginalised.

The Equality Mainstreaming Unit of the Equality Authority provides support packages to vocational providers for equality mainstreaming. It has worked with VECs to assist them to embed equality in their work. As educational providers VECs are required to adhere to the legislation in the provision of educational opportunities.

The Irish Vocation Education Association's guidelines for conducting equality impact assessments set out the IVEA and member VECs commitment to promoting equality and eradicating unlawful discrimination in provision as a core part of their business.[158]

The Economic Benefits of Learning

Important to policy makers are the cost/ benefits of education to individuals, and in relation to this research, the value of the adult learning sector to the State. The following points are salient to economic outcomes for the State of adult learning:

157 The grounds are: sexuality, ability, sexual orientation, race, membership of the Travelling community, gender, religious belief, age, marital status and family status. See www.equality.ie

158 IVEA/ Equality Authority. (2007). *Guidelines for Conducting Equality Impact Assessments on IVEA and VEC Plans, Policies and Programmes.* Equality Authority: Ireland.

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- In the New Zealand study, adult and community education represented more value than other community activities giving a $54-$72 dollar return on each dollar invested.
- In the same study, the authors assert that there is a greater marginal return for adult and community education that targets disadvantaged target groups, who make up the majority of the demographic it serves. Therefore, better value is found in money that is spent on targeted interventions.
- Taking women without qualifications to Level 2 training in the UK was assumed to lower the cost of depression to health services GBP 200 million a year.[159]
- Another New Zealand study showed a return of $9.36 per dollar over 30 years for a national family literacy programme due to increased income, reduced welfare and crime reduction.[160]
- A small scale piece of Irish research on the costs and benefits of adult learning for three individuals showed that together they accrued €731,493 net benefit by engaging in adult learning. This benefit was produced by an annual increase in income as a result of the learning multiplied by the number of years remaining to retirement.[161]

There would seem to be value for money for the State in funding adult learning not just for labour market progression and increasing income, but to save money in other funding arenas such as health and crime prevention. It is important for this research to find out the individual economic impact of community education, but also to aggregate results to ascertain the value of the sector to the State.

159 Thomas, C. ad S. Morris. (2003). "Cost of Depression among Adults in England in 2000." *British Journal of Psychiatry.* Vol. 183. 514-519.

160 Described in OECD. (2007). *Understanding the Social Outcomes of Learning.* OECD: France. 86.

161 AONTAS. (2009). *The Costs and Benefits of Undertaking Adult Education Courses, from the Perspective of the Individual.* AONTAS: Dublin.

Relevant Results

This section presents results of the research pertinent to the contribution of community education nationally as well as qualitative data about the role of research in ascertaining the impact and delivery of community education.

Contribution to the Equality Dimensions

In this section both quantitative and qualitative results of the research are presented under the dimensions of equality set out by Baker et al. The methodology employed for the quantitative results was:

- Outcomes tracked through the learner's survey relevant to the equality dimension were selected.
- The proportion of learners experiencing that outcome was applied to the national cohort of learners (N=55, 716) to get the national aggregate. This strategy is considered valid since the learner's survey was representative. For instance, if 30% of learners experienced an outcome the aggregate was calculated by finding the figure that was equivalent to 30% of learners nationally or 16, 716 learners.

Love, Care and Solidarity

In this section we consider the research results that fit within this dimension of the framework, such as outcomes related to family cohesion, and the creation of strong social networks. Only the outcomes that at least half the learners attributed to community education are presented.

Ninety-two percent of the respondents in the learners survey gave 'to make friends and have social contact' as a reason for participating in community education, illustrating that community education does have a role in linking people to social networks. It is useful to consider the main social engagement outcomes from the study to assess community education's specific contribution to the creation of strong social networks.

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Table 10.1 Social Engagement Outcomes Learner's Survey

Outcome	Measure	Percentage	Total No of Learners Nationally[162]
Talking to new people	**Some or large positive change**	89	49,587
Trying out new activities		88	49,030
More contact with friends		69	38,444
Willing to help neighbours		49	27,300
Greater trust in service providers		49	27,300
If I saw children skipping school and hanging out on a street corner	**More likely or much more likely to do in the community**	79	44,015
If the fire station closest to me was in danger of having its budget cut		65	36,215
If I saw children showing disrespect to an adult		64	35,658
If I saw children putting graffiti on a local building		59	32,872

In the table above we can see that social engagement outcomes related to love, care and solidarity are extensive and that most learners would experience them through community education.

Since this dimension is also about the creation of family cohesion let us turn to the main family related outcomes documented through community education set out in Table 10.2 below.

162 Calculated as the number of learners nationally who would experience the outcome if the results of the learner's survey are generalized to that population.

Table 10.2 Family Related Outcomes Learner's Survey (includes only those with dependent children N=273)

Family related outcome		Percentage	Total No of Learners Nationally[163]
My ability to be a positive role model for children	**Large or some positive change**	67	15,678
How much quality time I spend with my children		57	13,337
Your general parenting	**Positive change'**	61	14,274
Your ability to help your children with their homework		53	12,402
Your confidence in talking to your children about the importance of finishing school		60	14,040
Talked to children about alcohol and drug use	**Yes, I did this and I think it is as a result of my community education experience**	29	6786

Twenty-seven percent of the learner's survey sample indicated that they were engaged in unpaid caring work, which is relevant to this equality dimension. If we take the number of community education learners nationally and assume that 27% of them are engaged in caring work that means that 15,043 learners are involved in caring work.

Four of the strategic interviewees consulted for the research indicated a role for community education in facilitating people's sense of connection to others in their local areas and, sometimes, in their families, "bringing people together, realising we don't live in isolation" (strategic interviewee #7).

Since this dimension is also about relationships in the learning setting it is useful to point out that the results of the research showed that learners had experienced very positive relationships of empathy, respect and encouragement from tutors. Case study learners spoke about how tutors modeled those qualities for them, which led to them engaging in those types of relationships outside the learning setting and led to higher levels of trust and tolerance.

163 based on the assumption that, like the learner' survey sample, 42% of learners nationally have dependent children

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Respect and Recognition

This dimension is about participating in relationships of equality, respect and tolerance with other citizens. In order to assess community education's contribution to this dimension we refer to the main outcomes regarding the development of interpersonal trust and tolerance set out in the table below.

Table 10.3 Trust and Tolerance Outcomes Learner's Survey

Outcome	Percentage Positive Change	Total No of Learners Nationally
More accepting and understanding of beliefs that are different to my own	64	35,658
More accepting and understanding of other cultures	60	33,429
More sympathy for people I would have normally judged badly	59	32,872

Two of the strategic interviewees expressed community education's contribution to this sphere of equality. In particular, that it could assist the integration of new communities, "people from different countries and cultures becoming more a part of our communities, it's one area for Irish communities to engage with the new communities. Community education has a huge contribution to make in that regard" (strategic interviewee #4).

The research results also showed the ways in which the learner group and the tutors in community education assist personal development outcomes like positive change in self-confidence through intersubjective recognition. No learners indicated that they had experienced negative changes in personal development outcomes as a result of community education. This contributes to the positive recognition of diversity in community education and work to achieve equality in this dimension of the framework.

Power Relations

This dimension is about civic and personal rights and participation in the democratic process. Learners were less likely to indicate outcomes in regard to this dimension. However, there was some limited impact. To assess the contribution of community education in this dimension we return to the top five civic outcomes for community education.

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Table 10.4 Civic Engagement Outcomes Learner's Survey

Outcome	Percentage Positive Change	Total No of Learners Nationally
Decided to give something back to the community	32	17,829
Used internet	29	16,157
Began to read more books	25	13,929
Volunteered in community group	25	13,929
Watched news more often	25	13,929

The majority of the strategic interviewees named that community education made a contribution in this sphere in terms of fostering forms of active citizenship like voting and volunteering and community development.

Equality of Opportunity in Working and Learning

In order to assess community education's contribution in this dimension it is useful to start by considering the main progression outcomes for community education.

Table 10.5 Progression Outcomes Learner's Survey

Outcome	Percentage Yes I want to do this or have achieved this already	Total No of learners Nationally
Learn a new skill	70	39,001
Do a non-certified course with this group or centre	55	30,643
Get a certificate with this group or centre	52	28,972

About half of the interviewees indicated community education's role in the redress of inequality of opportunity in regard to education or upskilling for disadvantaged target groups.

The results of the learners survey pertaining to their demographic backgrounds showed us that, to a certain extent, community education is providing educational opportunities for people experiencing disadvantage. For instance, 45% of the learners aged 16-64 were early school leavers. Therefore, it is working to achieve equality in this dimension by fostering the motivation of disadvantaged learners to continue in education.

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Resources

In so far as community education engages people experiencing social exclusion in education, which could potentially lead to better qualifications for adequately remunerated employment the results of the research show a limited impact for community education. Contribution to this dimension is explored in the section on the economic benefits of community education below.

Analysis

When we take the results of the research and analyse them using the Baker et al's equality framework we can see that community education makes a contribution to the achievement of equality. In particular, it makes a strong contribution in the following dimensions: love, care and solidarity; trust and tolerance , and equality of opportunity for learning. Generalising the findings to the national total of learners shows that tens of thousands of learners could possibly experience outcomes in these dimensions. It does not make as much of an impact in relation to the power relations and resources dimensions.

The Economic Benefits of Community Education

Results are presented about the cost-benefit analysis for past case study learners.

Costs

A limited cost benefit analysis of community education learners was carried out as part of this research. The Community Education Budget for 2009 is €10.1M. According to the Department of Education Statistics for 2009 there were 55,716 learners in Ireland.[164]

These figures tells us that for programmes funded through the ALCES budget the cost is an average of €181.27 per learner per year to the government. However, according to the data received from the case study providers we know that they frequently draw upon a number of diverse funding sources to sustain their activities (the average was 4 sources of funding).

When all funding sources were taken into account, providers reported receiving an average of €93,407 per year between 2006 and 2009 inclusive. The average number of learners per year was 138, resulting in an average €676 spent per learner per annum.

164 the 2008 figure for City of Cork of 5,800 learners was used as proxy for this figure.

Benefits

The only outcomes that could be assigned a monetary value were increased income and volunteering. The results of the case studies in regard to these benefits are presented here. Nine past case study learners were asked to report on their income before they started community education and their current level of income. In general, learners reported moving from €205.56 of disposable income per week to €472.22 per week (this was calculated based upon an average move from income band 2 to 5), with an increase of €13,866 to their gross annual income (lower bound €11,111.36; upper bound €16,621.28).

The average amount of time spent in community education was 6.4 years and the majority (66.7%) reported completing four or more classes.

Eight of the ten past learners reported performing voluntary work in the last four weeks, with most learners (87.5%) reporting carrying out between 1 and 5 hrs of voluntary work and one past learner carrying out 11 to 20 hours of voluntary work.

Six learners reported that they felt that their participation in voluntary activities in community groups was a result of their community education experience (three reported that they had always done this anyway and one person reported that they did not volunteer in community groups but that they volunteered at their child's school and felt that it was a result of their community education experience).

According to the *House of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Arts, Sport, Tourism, Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs Sixth Report, Volunteers and Volunteering in Ireland* (2005) (http://www.volunteer.ie/PDF/Volunteers.pdf) the value of volunteering can be estimated to range from a low of minimum wage (€8.65) to a high of the average industrial wage (€14.38).[165]

The eight past learners reported a total of somewhere between 19 and 60 hours of volunteer work between them. Averaging the low and high value of volunteering gives us an average value of €11.52 per hour, resulting in a monthly estimate of the value of volunteering of €218.88 per month and a high of €691.20 per month. Given the learners own admission that they feel that community education directly led them to volunteer, a conservative estimate that 50% of volunteering activity reported by past learners can be attributed to their previous involvement community education. Taking 50% of this

165 Based upon the assumption of a 40 hr. work week and the 2006 average wage of €575.21 per week. (http://www.cso.ie/quicktables/GetQuickTables.aspx?FileName=QIJA.asp&TableName=Industrial+Earnings&StatisticalProduct=DB_QI)

previously calculated value and carrying it over one year still results in a substantial value for volunteering of previous community education learners:

- High estimate of value= €4,147.20 per learner per year
- Low estimate of value= €1,313.28 per learner per year

We can take the estimated number of learners nationally (N=13,929) who began to volunteer as a result of community education and estimate the value of that contribution as can be seen in the table below.

Table 10.6 Per Annum Volunteering as a Result of Community Education

Number of Learners x Estimate of Value:	**Return per year**
13,929 x high estimate 4,147.20	57, 766 348.80
13,929 x low estimate 1,313.28	18, 292 677.10
If 50% of learners cease volunteering:	
6964 x high estimate 4,147.20	28, 881 100.80
6964 x low estimate 1,313.28	9, 145 681.92

We can see from the above table that even with a conservative estimate for the number of people who start volunteering as a result of their community education experience the return per year to the State could be 9.1 million euro and as high as 28.8 million euro.

Analysis

While it is only possible to carry out a limited cost-benefit analysis of community education learning we can see from the above results that there are economic benefits for community education. These results must be taken cautiously as the case study learners were not representative of all learners in community education. However, we can see that for the past learners who spent an average of 6.4 years in community education their income did increase.

The most significant finding is the return per year to the State in regard to volunteering. Again, the results must be taken cautiously, but even if only 6,964 learners nationally began to volunteer as a result of their community education it could represent a low return of 9.1 million and a high return of 28.8 million. Even with a low return the Department would have recouped almost all of its 2009 investment in community education.

The Role of Research

Salient to this chapter is the role of research and objective identification of need in community education, as without evidence it is impossible to know the contribution it makes. Strategic interviewees were asked about how the role of research might be improved in relation to adult and community education policy and provision and, in some cases, how they used research to inform provision. Case study providers were questioned as to whether or not they collect data about their learners and if not, why not. Data is categorised under theme headings below.

Not enough evidence

All of the strategic interviewees indicated that there was a dearth of research available to inform the provision of community education, "In adult education there's a dearth of statistics" (strategic interviewee #4).

Most of the case study providers kept some kind of data on their learners. However, most indicated they did not track the wider benefits of learning. Others said that they did not use the information they kept or only kept information on certain programmes since it was required by funders. When asked why they did not engage in consistent tracking and collation of data many indicated they did not have the time or expertise to do that work. One said that they didn't feel that information was necessary to inform provision and that learner evaluations were enough to inform their work. All case study providers did say that they carried out evaluation and feedback for learners.

Three case study providers spoke about research that they had carried out about their local areas to inform their provision. Two of the interviewees indicated that they relied on local groups and organizations in the areas that they worked in to give them information about the needs of communities since these organisations had either carried out research or were close to the ground.

10 HOW DOES COMMUNITY EDUCATION CONTRIBUTE TO A FAIR, JUST AND MORE PROSPEROUS IRELAND?

Research needs to be prioritised from the top down

Strategic interviewees were clear that research needed to be promoted throughout the adult and community education system starting with DES:

> "There has to be much more rigour in funding, projects [need to be] given more funding to measure the impact of what they do, its about culture, its about incentives. Must be carrot and stick for doing research. Its about skills there's no consequence if you don't do it... you need champions... need leadership, needs professional cadres more people in policy-making with research skills [we need a] culture of responding to research... in CPD of education staff research needs to be built into that... teacher as action researcher... looking at how research is feeding into what they're doing... at administrative level training in how to commission and use research" (strategic interviewee #1).

Many of the interviewees indicated that part of the direction needed from DES was the development of more comprehensive tools for tracking the outcomes of community education. Five of the interviewees indicated the need to track wider outcomes than what are currently tracked by the Department.

Some interviewees indicated that other types of research could inform provision such as participation in larger international surveys like the Programme for the International Assessment for Adult Competencies (PIAAC). others indicated there was a role for AONTAS or other stakeholder organizations like NALA and the IVEA to carry out research.

Analysis

The qualitative data about the role of research shows that, to date, it has been difficult to know the impact of community education due to a lack of consistent data collection from the ground up. Interviewees were clear that an evidenced-based approach to community education policy and provision could only be achieved by a change in culture from the top-down accompanied by more comprehensive data collection tools and the completion of larger, national or international pieces of research.

DISCUSSION

Community education does make a contribution to a fair, just and more prosperous Ireland. It provides many disadvantaged learners with the opportunity and motivation to engage in learning new skills and potentially do certified learning with their providers.

In particular it has a significant impact in regard to the love, care and solidarity and respect and recognition dimensions where most learners would experience outcomes related to them. In regard to love, care and solidarity the outcomes experienced help to create strong social networks and social cohesion that can result in pride in community and safer communities. Parents in the sample also reported benefits in relation to family cohesion as a result of community education. Notable is that for many parents it helped them to talk to their children about the importance of education, which could contribute to the reduction of early school leaving. This outcome also makes an impact on equality of educational opportunity.

It also works to provide many carers with a reprieve from their caring responsibilities thereby ensuring that they can continue to engage in their caring work. It recognises their work by providing educational opportunities to them that can maintain their well-being.

Community education contributes to the development of trust and tolerance for most learners, which works to achieve equality in respect and recognition in communities across Ireland. The high frequency of positive change in self-confidence shows how community education engages in the recognition of learners, which redresses the effects of discrimination and promotes equality in the learning setting.

Since VECs maintain a commitment to eradicating discrimination and promoting equality, the research results suggest that community education helps them meet that requirement in their work.

While the impact of community education in the power relations dimension is not as notable as in the above mentioned it is here that we see its contribution to a more prosperous Ireland and its value for money. Even with conservative estimates the contribution made by those who begin to volunteer as a result of DES community education almost covers the cost of it to the Department per annum. At the upper end of the band with a conservative estimate regarding the numbers of learners there is a return to DES of double what was invested.

While this piece of research provides valuable information about community education the role of research in policy and provision needs to be strengthened with a commitment to evidence-based work throughout the system. This commitment would result in the development and use of appropriate tools to help recruitment of target groups under represented in community education and tracking of the outcomes, including those related to civic and social engagement, health and progression. Collecting more comprehensive data about community education would help VECs and the Department understand how programmes are impacting on equality for the target groups prioritised for community education.

11 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter the overall conclusions for the research are set out under relevant headings. Recommendations are made that arise from each of the conclusions. The reader is reminded that these conclusions and recommendations are made for DES funded community education only.

CONCLUSIONS

The Need for a Vision

This research has identified the need for key stakeholders to work towards a vision for community education, with agreement on policy that sets out key elements of a model, and incorporating BTEI and ALCES funded community education. Following from that guidelines for funding can be developed or amended, including agreement on priority groups and targets for their representation, outcomes to be achieved, principles to inform the work and criteria for funding that would help to attain the targets.

Without a vision and clear policy there will be continued variation in management of community education and the role of community education in working towards the equality of all types of disadvantaged groups and communities may not be as effective as it could be.

Some participants reflected on the proposed integrated adult education service in VECs and the place of community education in such a service. How the unique process and outcomes of community education and necessary resources could be maintained in such a service needs further debate.

The recommendations arising from this conclusion are:

- Create a clear vision for community education including a consistent approach, funding guidelines, principles, outcomes to be achieved, priority groups and targets.
- If an integrated adult education service approach is to be implemented, consider if the unique role and process of community education can be maintained in it, or if community education should be wholly funded and administered through its own budget line at national level as was originally envisioned in the White Paper.

Community Education Implements a Community Organisation/ Development Model

The results show that there are a variety of approaches to community education that are employed in the Irish context, but that the main one is a hybrid approach of a community organisation and a community development model. In other words education is brought to local areas in response to the community's identified needs as programmes that combat social isolation and foster personal development. However, there is less evidence in ALCES funded community education of action models for community education where groups experience collective development for local or broader social action.

As set out in Chapter Four, the White Paper on adult education proposed two definitions of community education. The first echoed the elements of the community organisation/ development model. The second, and the one which was given much emphasis in the paper, matched an action model of community education. This focus reflected the zeitgeist of community education at that particular moment in time and the way it had been shaped by women's community education groups whose work not only emphasised the personal development of women, but also the achievement of women's equality.

This research has shown that times have changed and there is less currency for the action model of community education in that funded by DES. The tutor approaches experienced by learners support this conclusion, since learners were least likely to associate their experience of tutors with actions such as talking about or planning to address problems in their local communities.

This conclusion suggests that stakeholders of DES funded community education could usefully consider whether they are satisfied that the community organisation/ development model is the best practice model to implement.

The learners experienced the models and tutor approaches they came into contact with positively. They were engaged in collaborative learning settings by tutors in relationships of empathy, encouragement, respect and equality. These qualities were used to describe the community education experience by case study providers and some strategic interviewees. Learners described tutors having a significant impact on: their academic self-belief; the way they treated other people, and their confidence to achieve other outcomes, civic, social, health and progression alike.

However, the approach employed has an impact on the outcomes achieved as we saw that without a central emphasis on action, civic and political engagement outcomes were the least likely to emerge from community education, while social engagement outcomes featured most strongly.

Recommendations arising from this conclusion are:

- Consider if this hybrid model is the most effective one to implement in Ireland or if another model would be more appropriate for achieving the characteristics and outcomes of community education that stakeholders agree are important.
- Develop a model for the continuous professional development of tutors/ facilitators that fosters the skills and qualities charted in the research.
- Make the skills and qualities emphasised in the research a requirement for the recruitment of community education tutors/ facilitators.

The Importance of a Locally Integrated Response

The case studies demonstrated how strongly managed centres with links to their local civil societies appeared to achieve higher rates of the outcomes measured in the research, particularly the civic engagement outcomes. These centres did not just provide educational opportunities, but also engaged in other services or interventions most often as a part of broader community development work responding to the overall needs of the community. For the most part, they also provided the full complement of supports to learners that were measured in this report.

They could encourage progression of learners to civic engagement opportunities inside and outside the centre, and could refer learners to local service providers if necessary. They also engaged in practices that encouraged specific outcome areas like having a volunteer service internally for civic outcomes or being linked with a local health initiative for health outcomes.

A lesson from the Education Equality Initiative is that an integrated local approach is the strategy for combating educational disadvantage. Those who support community education may wish to grant funding to groups on the basis that they have the capacity to provide an integrated approach both internally and externally. As per their job description, community education services in VECs need to continue to assist community education groups to develop partnerships with statutory or other community groups so that these providers can take an integrated approach.

Since case study providers were funded under the BTEI Community Strand the results from this cohort of the study may show that the strict guidelines, principles and criteria for community education resourced in this way is more effective at ensuring that only groups who can deliver an integrated response are funded.

Recommendations arising from this conclusion are:

- Include as a funding criteria for all community education groups that they must demonstrate an integrated local approach for the delivery of educational opportunities or must be committed to developing an approach as part of their provision.
- Ensure that all community education services can assist groups to develop integrated approaches.
- Use the case studies as a model to develop a guide for providers that can assist them to develop an integrated approach.

Community Education Enhances Learning

This aim is one of the three named for community education in the most recent directive from DES outlined in the introduction to the report. The research has shown that it realises this aim at the individual level, because the majority of learners indicated positive experiences of the learning environment, removal of barriers to learning and experienced of many of the factors that encourage persistence in learning.

Most learners were motivated to continue learning after the current course they were involved in. Half of the learners surveyed wanted to move into certified learning as a result of community education. One way of enhancing the learning in community education would be to offer the option of accreditation in community education.

The research also found that learners share multiple concepts of progression. This finding suggests that it is important that community education continues to enhance learning by retaining a space where the learner's intent and goals for learning are respected.

The research also showed that levels of knowledge about the NFQ are low and that it would be useful for learners to better understand the framework. There is a role for both providers and the NQAI in promoting the Framework.

In terms of enhancing learning for collective development the research has shown that community education is less effective evidenced by: the lack of implementation of an action model of community education; less than half the learners indicating that their

tutor helped them plan for and address problems in their community, and a limited proportion of learners experiencing civic engagement outcomes. This type of learning requires a particular tutor approach and model of community education described in Chapter Four. If stakeholders would like to see enhancement of learning for collective development there will need to be particular attention paid to the competences of tutors relevant to this type of learning and an agreed, consistent approach to community education.

The emerging focus of learners on accreditation in community education asks stakeholders to consider if there is sufficient emphasis on community education as a process for both individual and collective development. A question that arises here is how do learners themselves perceive the role of community education? Do they see it as functional adult learning in their local area? If providers and personnel do not wish them to see it solely as that, then the data suggests that they might better promote community education as a type of learning that does not just focus on individual development.

The recommendations arising from this conclusion are:

- Continue to emphasise the practices that encourage persistence in community education.
- Offer the option of accreditation to community education learners, but do not make it a requirement.
- Track the type of progression that community education learners are interested in and highlight to them the progression options available by liaising with the Adult Education Guidance Service.
- Demonstrate how FETAC modules and awards fit into the National Framework of Qualifications and how learners can progress through the framework.
- Promote to learners and providers the dual value of community education for individual development and collective development for action. For instance, through case studies of other groups who have focused on both in their learning.
- Ensure that tutors understand the concept of collective development for action and can employ pedagogy that will facilitate it.

Community Education Results in Empowerment

The research showed that community education is meeting this aim for community education and is very effective at doing so. It accomplishes this goal by achieving, for many of the learners, the personal development outcomes measured in the research, such

as positive change in confidence, ability to do things by themselves, communication with others and problem solving.

Community education results in community empowerment by achieving outcomes that help to build strong social networks, trust and tolerance between community members and safer communities where individuals are more likely to intervene in situations that would sully community life.

The one area relevant to individual empowerment that community education had a limited impact on was empowerment of learners to make positive physical health related changes. This finding opens up a discussion for providers and policy-makers, which is to what extent community education should result in these changes for learners. If this area is one that should be enhanced, learning related to it will need to be integrated into programmes. This integration could happen through the practices that case study providers engaged in such as having health related information on site, linking with local health providers and incorporating health learning into the curriculum.

The recommendations arising from this conclusion are:

- Promote the continuing value of community education for individual empowerment, personal development and community empowerment.
- Discuss and agree to what extent community education should achieve physical health related outcomes.
- Promote the value of providers engaging in practices that can achieve physical health related outcomes such as having health-related information on site, linking with local health providers or local sports partnerships, and incorporating health learning into programmes.

Community Education makes a Limited Contribution to Civic Society

Community education is not as effective at achieving outcomes related to its third aim of civic engagement, illustrated by relatively low rates of learners experiencing these outcomes, although in its empowerment outcomes it does prepare learners for this type of activity.

If the Government, providers and VEC personnel would like to see these outcomes emerge more frequently they will need to agree the elements of a community education model

that places these outcomes at the centre of the model. Practitioners and those who support them will need to find ways to integrate civic and political education into the learning. Case study providers demonstrated that one way to achieve these outcomes is to have strong links to local civil society so that they can refer learners to opportunities if they so wish. They also engaged in such practices as: including community social inclusion issues into course content, and having volunteer opportunities within the centre. These practices are consistent with an action approach to community education.

The Women's Community Education Quality Assurance Framework was presented as a practical guide to community education that described an action approach. Personnel and providers who are interested in employing such an approach in order to improve the frequency of civic engagement outcomes could consult this framework.

The recommendations arising from this conclusion are:

- Promote the value of an action model for community education in achieving civic engagement outcomes.
- Agree the extent to which these types of outcomes should occur through community education.
- Ensure that tutors/ facilitators are able to integrate civic learning into programmes.
- Ensure that providers can engage in practices that help to achieve civic engagement outcomes such as links to volunteer opportunities or consideration of local social inclusion issues in courses.
- Employ or promote the Women's Community Education Quality Assurance Framework as a practical guide to the implementation of an action model of community education that can enhance the achievement of civic engagement outcomes.

The Openness of the Learning Environment is Essential

This aspect of community education was most frequently identified as the one, which allowed outcomes to emerge. In an open environment, learners' experiences are the starting point for the learning, the tutor allows plenty of discussion and can let the learning change direction towards valuable learning moments that may not necessarily have been planned. In such an environment there is multi-valent learning and wide benefits result. The research confirms a finding from the literature in Chapter Four, which

is that the group becomes a resource for the learning in community education[166]. We cannot conclude whether this type of learning environment is wholly unique to community education, but it certainly is a central feature of the learning in this sector.

If the accruing of human capital for learners can only be achieved after the development of social capital in learning groups then community education is a successful foundation for the development of both types of capital.

The recommendation arising from this conclusion is:

- Ensure that organisational policies and procedures articulate standards that make essential the conditions necessary to create a collaborative, open learning environment for community education programmes.

Community Education makes a Contribution to Equality

The research has shown that the contribution of community education to Ireland is substantial. Community education, in particular, works to achieve equality in the creation of relationships of love, care and solidarity in Ireland by fostering social connection, and family and social cohesion. It has been shown to foster equality by creating respectful relationships amongst citizens in its development of trust and tolerance. It contributes to the recognition of learners by developing their self-confidence. This type of recognition has been shown to be essential to equality and participatory democracy.

It does create educational opportunity for people who are disadvantaged as the majority of the learner's survey sample experienced rates of disadvantage higher than the general population. Therefore, it could help VECs and DES to promote equality in the delivery of educational opportunity and to assess the impact of their work in this regard.

Community education's contribution to equality could be strengthened if it's part in developing civic society was enhanced, as more groups might take action to address inequality.

166 Connolly, Brid. (2003). "Community Education: listening to the Voices." The Adult Learner. 2003.

The recommendations arising from this conclusion are:

- Promote the importance of the development of self-confidence in community education as a form of recognition that can help to achieve equality for learners.
- Use the results of this research to argue for the adequate resourcing of community education.
- Highlight how community education helps VECs and DES to promote equality and chart the impact of their work in this regard.
- Strive to achieve higher rates of civic engagement outcomes for community education.

Community Education Represents Value for Money and can Contribute to Prosperity

Although it cannot be valued monetarily, it is likely that community education represents diminished expenditure for the State in relation to the health outcomes it achieves such as eating more healthily and taking more exercise.

Community education has the potential to make a significant financial return to the State in terms of the creation of volunteers in communities throughout Ireland. At the very least, it almost pays for itself in this regard. It can also help some individuals to increase their incomes.

Community education could also have a role to play in achieving the goals of the *National Skills Strategy* as a substantial number of learners were interested in achieving certification with their community education provider. This demonstrates how community education could enhance its contribution to development of human capital in Ireland.

The recommendations arising from this conclusion are:

- As above, use the results of this research to argue for sustainable funding for community education.
- Promote the role that community education can play in achieving the National Skills Strategy as well as the development of participatory democracy.
- Highlight the impact of community education on volunteering in Ireland to key stakeholders such as the Taskforce on Active Citizenship.

The BTEI Community Strand is Potentially a Model for Best Practice

A tentative conclusion is that community education funded under this strand is more likely to result in the outcomes, practices and recruitment of priority target groups for community education.

The BTEI Community Strand providers may not have been representative of all community education providers funded under this strand so further research would need to be done to definitively confirm the efficacy of BTEI Community Strand provision. However, it is clear from the research that the clear guidelines for the strand resulted in the BTEI case study providers consulted for this study achieving: more frequent rates of CSE outcomes, and delivery of an integrated response. At a national level we saw that there is more effective recruitment of priority target groups for this strand.

The guidelines for this strand are potentially a model of best practice for the formulation of guidelines for ALCES funded community education. The centres funded may provide valuable case studies for policy-makers, providers and practitioners to learn from.

The recommendations arising from this conclusion are:

- Use the BTEI Guidelines as a template to develop clear guidelines for ALCES funded community education.
- Share case studies of BTEI groups with other providers, VECs and practitioners.
- Administer the learner's survey to a representative sample of learners in this strand to compare to the findings of the survey presented in this research.
- Promote and share published BTEI guidelines, such as those about involving men, and outreach, to other DES community education stakeholders.

There is a Need for more Evidence

The research found that there is not a culture of research, evidenced-based practice or use of objective tools at all levels of the system. There was strong feeling that this situation needed to be dealt with from the top down including consultation with stakeholders. Without a culture of measuring outcomes or making decisions based on evidence it will be difficult to consistently track the benefits of community education, to ensure that an agreed approach is being utilised and target groups are being reached.

By not consistently tracking the wider benefits of community education it is difficult to see the contribution that community education makes both in the realm of human capital but also in the creation of a vibrant democracy, an imperative described at the start of this report. By not doing so there is a risk that economy related outcomes will be prioritised. Tracking the wider benefits of community education will also help policy-makers confirm if it is achieving equality and civic society goals.

Accomplishing this project would require a supportive approach especially for providers who report being overburdened in the day-to-day work.

More evidence would be needed to show that DES funded community education is distinguishable from other types of adult learning or even community education funded through other programmes. This evidence could only be gathered by employing a similar research methodology and data collection tools with learners in other types of provision.

The recommendations arising from this conclusion are:

- Ensure that all funding granted for community education ring fences resources to evaluate programmes.
- Integrate the importance of evidence-based practice into CPD for community educators and third level programmes relevant to the practice of adult and community education.
- Provide training for providers about evidence-based practice and tracking outcomes.
- Endeavour to commence annual nationally standardized tracking of the wider benefits of learning through the indicators, which emerged from this study as well as any others that stakeholders agree are important. Use the learner's survey questionnaire as a template for this exercise. The tool could initially be piloted in one or two VEC areas or administered only to a representative cohort of learners.
- Carry out comparative research to assess the outcomes of other types of adult learning in Ireland, as well as community education not solely funded through the Department of Education and Science. If appropriate, use a similar methodology and tools to this study so that the data is comparable.

The Research has Established Tentative Indicators for Community Education

This research suggests the following indicators for community education set out in the table below. They are either the top three outcomes in each outcome area assessed through the research, or outcomes that were experienced by over 50% of the learners.

Table 11.1 Indicators for Community Education

Outcome Area	Indicator (Nos of learners)
Civic and Political Outcomes	decided to give something back to the community used the internet[167] began to read more books volunteered in community group watched the news more often
Social engagement outcomes	positive change in talking to new people positive change in trying out new activities positive change in more contact with friends more likely to do something about five community situations
Trust and tolerance outcomes	positive change more accepting and understanding of beliefs that are different to my own positive change more accepting and understanding of other cultures positive change more sympathy for people I would have judged badly
Family outcomes	positive change in ability to be a positive role model for children positive change quality time with children positive change general parenting positive change ability to help children with their homework positive change confidence in talking to children about importance of finishing school talked to children about alcohol and drug use
Health outcomes	positive change in confidence positive change in sense of purpose/ hope positive change level of happiness started to eat more fruit and vegetables started to exercise a bit more
Progression outcomes	want to learn a new skill want to do a non-certified course with this group/ centre want to get a certificate with this group/ centre

167 The reader is reminded that the outcomes 'used the internet' and 'began to read more books' are included as civic and political outcomes as they relate to the development of critical media interpretation.

These indicators only link to the outcomes that were found to be notable through this research. They would need to be tested in other large-scale pieces of research longitudinally, such as annual tracking at national level. Also, if stakeholders are anxious to ensure that an action approach is employed in community education other outcomes might need to be tracked to show that the adopted approach is being implemented. It would also be worthwhile to share the results of this study internationally as part of the work towards the development of internationally comparative indicators.

The recommendations arising from this conclusion are:

- Discuss and agree any other outcomes to be tracked surplus to the list above as part of a national tracking exercise.
- Review the efficacy of these indicators on an annual basis.
- Use this research to engage in international work towards the development of internationally comparable indicators.

There needs to be more Effective Targeting of all the Priority Target Groups for Community Education

The research did find that the majority of learners consulted were disadvantaged, but not all stated groups were well represented. Therefore, providers and personnel will need to find a way to target these learners while maintaining the unique ethos of community education. CEFs could do this work by continuing to proactively build relationships with organisations who represent these target groups, and promoting the role of community education to them. Policy-makers could decide targets for representation of each priority target group in the overall cohort of community education learners for both ALCES and BTEI Community Strand programmes.

In particular, men are still under-represented in community education. The literature described the elements of BTEI learning that attract men including access to vocational learning in both the formal and community strands that targets local employment, integrates basic skills and emphasizes appropriate certification options.[168] In order to improve the participation of men, providers and personnel may need to ensure that programmes include these elements.

168 AONTAS. (2008). Increasing Men's Participation in Adult Learning. Department of Education and Science: Ireland.

The literature also showed the importance of outreach for engaging hard-to-reach learners. This work is resource intensive, but successful. Therefore, its value could be consistently promoted and it could be financed accordingly.

Of note is that there was some consensus in the research for community education to work with all members of communities since it is sometimes impossible to know what is going on in people's lives. It was also mentioned that learners with more educational advantage, for instance, could serve as a resource for the group. This finding suggests that there should be some room left in community education for people who do not necessarily fit into designated target groups. For instance, the research showed that community education is important to rural people as a way to ensure social contact. Not all rural people would be experiencing disadvantage, but community education might help to prevent the erosion of rural communities.

The recommendations arising from this conclusion are:

- Continue to proactively work with groups and providers who work with the harder-to-reach target groups for community education.
- Create targets for the representation of priority target groups in the overall cohort of learners in both BTEI and ALCES community education.
- Provide training on outreach for providers and for third level programmes about adult and community education.
- Ring fence funding for outreach in community education programmes and community education services. Particularly, for those groups that are harder-to-reach as this work requires extra resources.
- Ensure there are places reserved in community education for learners who do not fit into the priority target groups.

Implementing the Recommendations

The recommendations have not been assigned definitively to stakeholders, as further discussion about their implementation is necessary. However, some recommendations can be signposted for specific stakeholders.

The recommendations to do with a vision, model, clear guidelines, effective targeting and research are of interest to a group representative of all the stakeholders in DES funded community education as these actions require a co-ordinating function to oversee the work. This function has been absent for adult and community education since the dissolution of the National Adult Learning Council. These recommendations also point to the need for co-ordinated work by all stakeholders in adult and community education allied to a strategic vision driven by the Department of Education and Skills.

Recommendations about the continuous professional development of tutors, standards for the community education learning environment and an integrated local approach are very relevant to providers and those who support provision, such as the CEFs. Tutors themselves could also consider any of these recommendations for their own practice.

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13 APPENDIX A

SAMPLE PROFILES FOR VEC PERSONNEL, CEFs, CASE STUDIES AND INTERVIEWS

Sample of VEC Personnel for Understanding of Community Education Survey

Table 13.1 Profile of VEC Personnel Survey Sample

Role	Response Percent	Response Count
CEO	8.5%	5
EO with responsibility for Adult and Community Education	1.7%	1
AEO	33.9%	20
CEF (Community Education Facilitator)	50.8%	30
Development Worker	5.1%	3
Other (please specify)		13
Answered question		59
Skipped question		13

Sample of CEFs for Provision of Community Education Survey

This survey was completed by 31 VECs. All were completed by CEFs except for one, which was filled out by an Education Officer. County Dublin and County Meath did not submit this questionnaire.

Provider Case Studies

Table 13.2 Case Study Providers

Provider	Criteria
Beoirs Women's Group – Bray Travellers' CDG (Wicklow)	Traveller/ Ethnic minority
Meitheal Muscrai – (County Cork)	Rural (Gaeltacht)
D8CEC (Dublin)	Urban
Meitheal Mara (Cork City)	Men
Tir Boghaine – Active Age Group (Donegal)	Older People's
St Munchin's (Limerick City)	FRC
Rossinver (Leitrim)	Small group
Bawnogue Women's Development Group (Clondalkin, Dublin City)	Women's
IO Collective (Kerry)	Disability
Spafield Family Resource Centre (Tipperary)	Anti-poverty
Killucan Area Services (Meath)	Large centre

Fourteen women and eight men participated as case study learners. All identified as White Irish.

Strategic Interviews

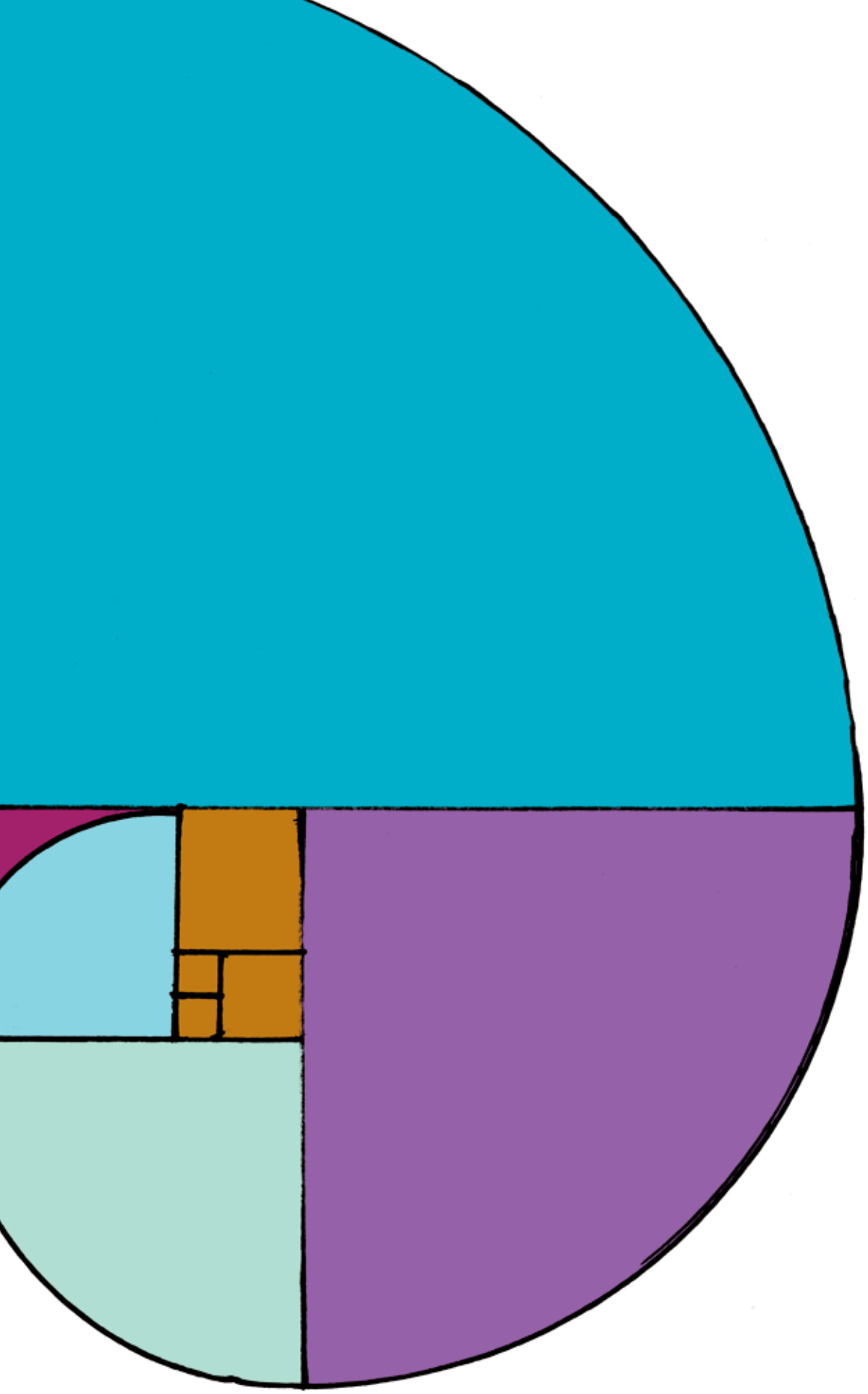
Table 13.3 Strategic Interviewees for Research

Name	Organisation
Mary Kett	National BTEI Co-ordinator, Further Education Unit, Department of Education and Science
Martha Bolger	Chair, Community Education Facilitators Association
Fiona O'Loughlin	President, Adult Education Officers Association
Pat O'Mahoney	Research Officer Irish Vocational Education Association
Sean Haughey	Minister for Lifelong Learning
John Fitzgibbon	Education Officer Cork City VEC
Liz Waters, An Cosan	Community Education Network
Seamus Hempenstall	Principal Officer, Further Education Unit, DES
Helen Keogh	National Co-ordinator, VTOS

14 APPENDIX B

DUTIES OF CEFs

- The duties of the post will include, under the direction of the CEO/EO/AEO of the VEC and in accordance with the overall plan for the service approved by the Adult Education Board, (or Local Adult Learning Board when established),
- Maintaining an ethos appropriate to adult learning
- Assisting the planning, development and management of the local community education service under the direction of the CEO/EO/AEO in accordance with the overall plan for the service approved by the local Adult Education Board (or Local Adult Learning Board when established),
- promoting the development and nurturing of new community based learning groups;
- providing assistance and support to new and existing community education groups in the form of technical, administrative and educational inputs;
- developing and encouraging partnerships and links between community education and statutory and other providers;
- promoting the role of the community education sector in supporting outreach and referral to the statutory sector;
- initiating and facilitating community education programmes and initiatives at outcentres
- liaising on quality assurance, accreditation and certification issues;
- helping community education interests to access funding;
- networking of groups, both nationally and locally, supporting their participation in community for, and facilitating a co-ordinated input from the sector into the work of Local Adult Learning Boards and the County/City Development Boards;
- sharing good practice from the sector and supporting the mainstreaming of relevant lessons into national policy and practice;
- monitoring initiatives, reporting to the CEO/EO/AEO on developments and provision, and informing the work of the National Adult Learning Council.
- Acting in a representative capacity if required on matters relating to community education
- Assisting in the management of resources, e.g financial, premises, materials, personnel etc as appropriate, relevant to the needs of the local programme
- Keeping records and preparing reports and submissions in consultation with the CEO/EO/AEO as appropriate
- Any other duties appropriate to the needs of the local scheme as may be assigned by the CEO/EO/AEO for the effective and efficient management of resources.



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