

**A  
case  
for**

**For adults only**

**adult  
education  
in  
Ireland**

Maureen Bassett

Berni Brady

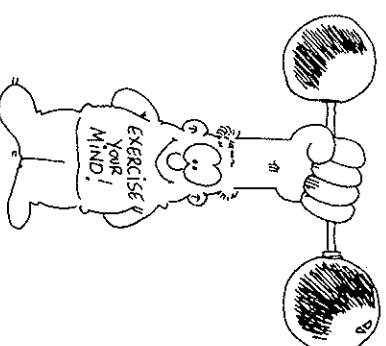
Ted Fleming

Tom Inglis



# For adults only

A case for adult education in Ireland



Maureen Bassett  
Berni Brady  
Ted Fleming  
Tom Inglis

*Illustrations by John Byrne*

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## Foreword

We have a proud tradition of education in Ireland. We have shown a commitment to learning over the years even when the odds were against us. Adult education has been part of that tradition. It helps people answer questions about themselves and the family, community and society in which they live. It provides self-confidence and respect. It helps people attain new skills and learn old crafts. It can lead to educational qualifications. In the recent past, we have been preoccupied with educating our large population of young people. We now need to pay greater attention to the educational needs of adults. We need a new vision of adult education.

At this point in time, this new report from AONTAS is most welcome. It maps out clearly the condition of adult education in Ireland, analyses its strengths and weaknesses and makes some sound suggestions as to how the system could be improved.

The report is part of the commitment of AONTAS to promote and develop adult education. Following a series of research reports on specific topics such as day-time adult education, the Irish language and education for older people, the AONTAS Executive Committee recognised the need for a report which would provide a general overview of adult education in Ireland today, and which would set out concisely the issues facing its future development.

Three members of the Executive Committee, Ms. Maureen Bassett, Ms. Berni Brady and Dr. Ted Fleming worked together with the Director, Dr. Tom Inglis to produce this report. They have served AONTAS well. They chart with great clarity the way forward for Irish adult education. They identify areas of responsibility and specify what needs to be done to develop an adult education system based on well thought out policies. There is here an agenda for immediate future action in adult education.

I am proud to present this report to the membership of AONTAS and to all those interested in the development of adult education. The report will, I am certain, become a standard reference for years to come. Together with the other members of the AONTAS Executive, I would like to express my congratulations and gratitude to the authors.

Go raibh an díograis agus an fuadar fuinn chun gur féidir linn éiríonnú go héifeachtach leis an obair uasal a chur i gcríoch.

*Brendan Conway*  
President

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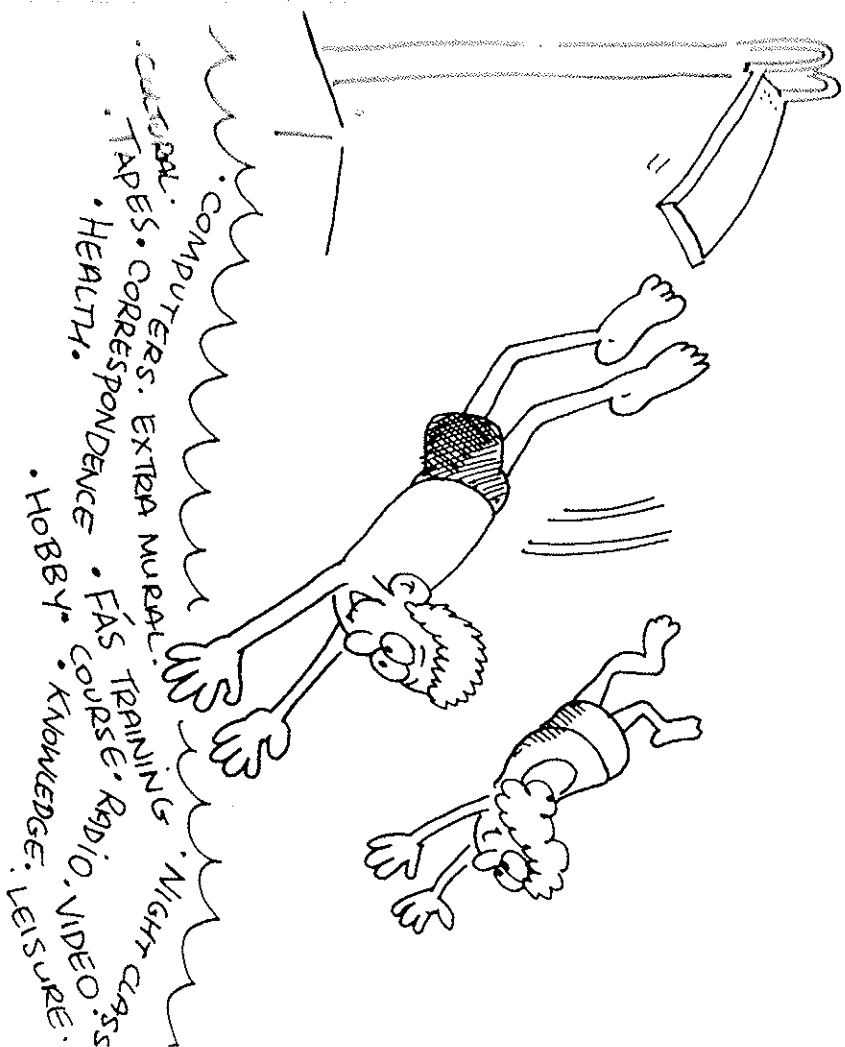
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## 1 Introduction

*Each year in Ireland, it is estimated that up to 200,000 adults engage in some form of education. These adults who are from all sorts of backgrounds have finished their initial education and want to engage in some form of further education.*



The course they take may be part of an adult education programme put on in the local vocational, community or comprehensive school. It may be a FÁS training programme. It may be an extra-mural course offered through a university or other third level college. It might also be a correspondence or distance education course using tapes, computers, videos, radio or television.

People may take courses as part of their work; to update their knowledge and skills. It may be part of their social and cultural life; to learn a new language or the history of the area in which they live. It may be part of their personal development; to improve their health and lifestyle or get to know themselves and the society in which they live.

People who take part in adult education may do so as a means towards a specific end such as getting a job, changing career, improving their prospects of promotion, getting a diploma, certificate or degree or, most basic of all, in order to learn to read and write. Other people take part in adult education as a hobby or leisure activity, perhaps to learn how to play a musical instrument or to make or repair furniture. Some see adult education as an end in itself; as part of their love of knowledge and learning. Whatever their reason for participating, for thousands of people adult education is one of the most important, or indeed the only, worthwhile educational experience of their lives and one which opens up so many future possibilities for learning.

The people who are involved in teaching adult education courses generally do not do so for the love of money. Most adult educators work on a part-time, temporary basis. Many work for little or nothing. They teach because they enjoy teaching. They enjoy helping people to share what they already know. It is this mixture of voluntary effort and dedicated commitment which makes adult education in Ireland the most cost effective form of education.

Adult education plays an integral part in our social, cultural and economic development. It is central to the maintenance and development of a mature democratic society. It provides an opportunity for people to develop their knowledge, understanding and skills and through improved co-operation and communication to create a better community, society and environment in which to live.

Adult education is a celebration of learning; living proof that human beings have a natural instinct to learn in the same way in which plants have to grow. It can help people realise their potential to be and do what they want. It can be dynamic, flexible and exciting. It has no particular form, no set curriculum. Its main asset is that it can mould itself to the needs and interests of each group of learners.

Adult education is one of the most innovative, dynamic and challenging areas of education. It is an opportunity for people to learn what they like, where they like, how they like and with whom they like. It can bring a new dimension of freedom and enlightenment to learning.

### **THE RIGHT TO LEARN**

**The right to learn is:**

- the right to read and write**
- the right to question and analyse**
- the right to imagine and create**
- the right to read one's own world and to write history**
- the right to have access to educational resources**
- the right to develop individual and collective skills**

**Decision unanimously adopted by the 4th International UNESCO Conference on Adult Education (1985)**

But there are basic problems regarding adult education in Ireland. There are many different opinions as to what adult education is about and what needs to be done to improve it. Most people involved in adult education in Ireland agree that it is underdeveloped and underfunded. There is no official government policy on adult education. There is little official government recognition of the vital role it can play in social and cultural life. In Ireland, the government spends less than one sixth of one percent (0.16%) of the total amount spent on education on adult education. The Danish government spends six per cent of their educational budget on adult education — 36 times as much as we do.

It is difficult to describe how adult education in Ireland is organised. Courses take place on an *ad hoc* local basis from year to year. There are no agreed standards, no requirements about who can teach, and few procedures for advice or complaint. There is no central planning or organisation.

In spite of the enormous benefits which people get from adult education, it does not receive enough credit in that it is difficult for adult learners, if they so wish, to obtain nationally recognised educational awards for what they have learnt. Third level education remains inaccessible to most adults; only 1.4% of third level students are over twenty-five years. This compares with almost thirty per cent in the United Kingdom and the United States. This means that in terms of accredited and certified learning, there is little beyond the Leaving Certificate available to Irish adults.

Adult education in Ireland is mainly taken up by those who already have some educational qualifications and who can afford the fees. This is unfortunate since adult education has most to contribute to those who lack basic education and who would like a second chance to learn. Despite subventions made, for example, through the Adult Literacy and Community Education budget and the Educational Opportunities Scheme, most Irish people have to pay for what they learn, on average up to £25 for a ten-week course, regardless of their income.

## TOWARDS THE NEXT CENTURY

Given the high level of interest and participation in adult education in Ireland and yet, at the same time, its lack of development in terms of policies, funding, facilities and resources, what reasonable expectations should we have for adult education in Ireland in the next century?



Given the importance that many people attach to adult education and the necessity they see of continuing to learn throughout their lives, it is reasonable to expect that adult education would be given the proper recognition and status it deserves. This recognition and status needs to come from all those involved in the development of Irish society including the government, local authorities, educational providers, semi-state bodies, private corporations and voluntary associations.

By the end of this century, it would be reasonable to expect that the government, which is ultimately responsible for the promotion and development of adult education, would have devised a systematic plan for the development of adult education which would be implemented through appropriate legislation. This legislation would be linked to a greatly expanded section within the Department of Education which would have specific responsibility for planning, organisation and development.

As the school-going population continues to decline towards the end of this century, it is to be expected that there will be more funds available for adult education. It may take a long time before we reach a stage, like Denmark, where there is an open budget for adult education dictated by the level of demand for courses. But it is reasonable to expect that even now one per cent of the total education budget would be spent on adult education and that by the beginning of the next century this would have increased to at least five per cent.

Tens of thousands of people are emigrating from Ireland each year. Of those who stay, close to a quarter of a million people are unemployed. It is estimated that one third of the population are living in poverty. Many of these have little or no education. There are four hundred thousand adults who have difficulty reading and writing. One million adults never went beyond Primary school. It is an immediate priority, therefore, that all those who are poor, unemployed or otherwise disadvantaged and who have most to gain from participation in adult education should not be prevented from doing so because they cannot afford it. By the end of this century, it is reasonable to expect that every Irish adult who wishes to learn to read and write or to attain a basic educational qualification such as the Leaving Certificate, should be financially supported and encouraged to do so.

Given the present high level of unemployment, the enormous competition to get a job and the increasing demand for educational

qualifications, we should expect that by the end of this century people who participate in educational courses should, if they wish, be able to attain a nationally recognised certificate. This should count towards a formal degree, diploma or certificate.

We are entering a new age of technology and an expanded European Market in which there will be an increasing demand for Irish people to develop and update their knowledge, skills and information. All members of the labour force should have the opportunity to engage in whatever training, retraining, professional and continuing education courses that help maintain and develop their own knowledge and expertise.

Teaching adults is very different to teaching school pupils or college students. The vast majority of those who teach adults in Ireland do not have any specific educational qualifications for the task. As an immediate priority, there is a need to ensure that all those engaged in teaching adults have access to tutor-training and are encouraged and financially supported to do so. We should look forward to the time in Ireland when all those involved in teaching adults will have been trained to do so and will be in a position to use the most modern methods and practices of adult education.

Many adults have a negative attitude to education and learning, partly as a result of their experience in school. There is a need for special courses as well as advisory and counselling services so that adults can develop a positive attitude to learning and become aware of the importance of continuing education. It is an immediate priority that funds and resources be made available to devise up-to-date adult education courses and programmes for those adults who were not able to take advantage of their initial education. It is reasonable to expect that by the beginning of the next century there will be an increasing number of specially designed education and open-learning centres in which adults, using the latest up-to-date methods and technology, can learn what they need, when they like and how they like.

## About This Report

This report is an attempt to provide a detailed overview of the issues and problems facing the development of adult education in Ireland. It is written for those people interested and involved in various aspects of social and cultural life who wish to know more about adult education. It attempts to provide a rational, coherent argument for developing adult education in Ireland, to analyse the kind of learning that takes place within adult education, to identify and describe the main priority areas, issues and problems facing adult education and to suggest some solutions.

As will become clear throughout the report, we make a distinction between education and training. In a way, adult education includes both general and liberal educational programmes which help us understand each other and the world in which we live, as well as specific skill training courses which teach us to master and control the world more effectively. We feel, however, that while there are funds, policies and plans for adult training in Ireland, particularly through the work of FÁS and Teagasc, there is little being done for adult education.

Our report begins by arguing that there is a need for every citizen concerned with the development of Irish society to be informed about the importance of adult education, the contribution it makes to developing mentally alert and critical thinking people. This in turn, is central to maintaining a vibrant, productive mature democratic society. (Chapter 1) It is necessary to distinguish education from training by understanding that learning a skill or technique is an essentially different kind of learning from understanding people and helping to create a better society and environment in which to live. (Chapter 2)

If adult education in Ireland is to be improved, there is a need to be familiar with the way it is structured and organised at present. Who provides the courses? Who does the teaching? Who nurturi-

pass? We also need to make some basic suggestions as to how key areas such as funding, tutors and teaching, resources and facilities might be improved (Chapter 3).

Adult education is often difficult to describe because it involves such a wide range of areas. We need to be clear about which groups in society are given priority with regard to adult education. We need to be familiar with basic issues such as adult basic education, day-time education and community education (Chapter 4).

Adult education aims to ensure that the largest number of adults possible participate in a wide range of courses suited to their needs and interests. It therefore involves issues such as broadcasting, distance learning, accreditation, access to courses and advisory and counselling services (Chapter 5).

Finally, we need to think about how to maintain and develop the field of adult education in Ireland not just in terms of national and international contacts, but also in terms of doing the necessary research, bringing forward new policies and ideas and, in general, making it relevant to the needs and interests of Irish society in an expanded Europe looking towards the future (Chapter 6).

## Further Reading

John S. Peters, *Adult and Continuing Education: Theory and Practice*. London: Croom Helm, 1984.

\_\_\_\_\_, *Adult Learning in the Social Context*. London: Croom Helm, 1987.

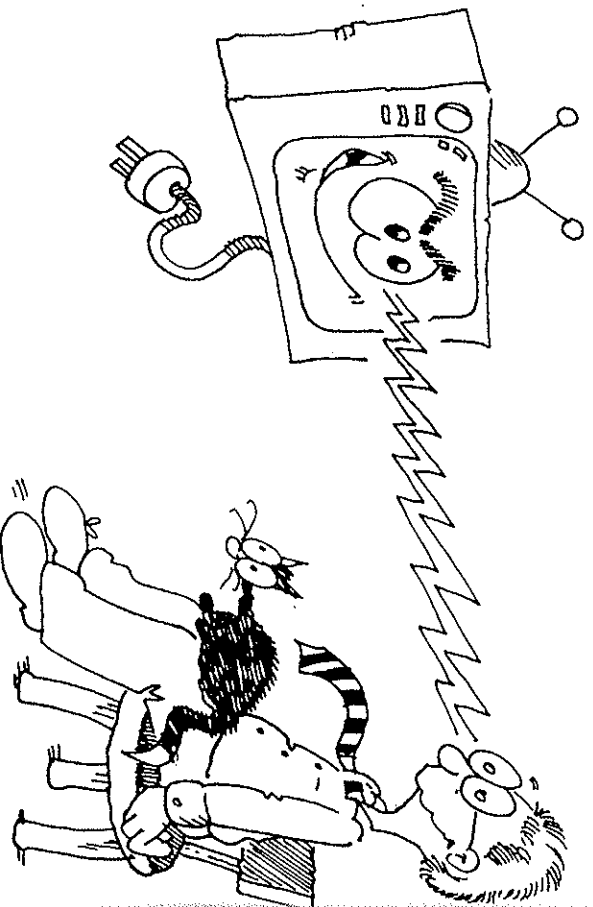
\_\_\_\_\_, *Adult Learning in the Social Context*. London: Croom Helm, 1986.

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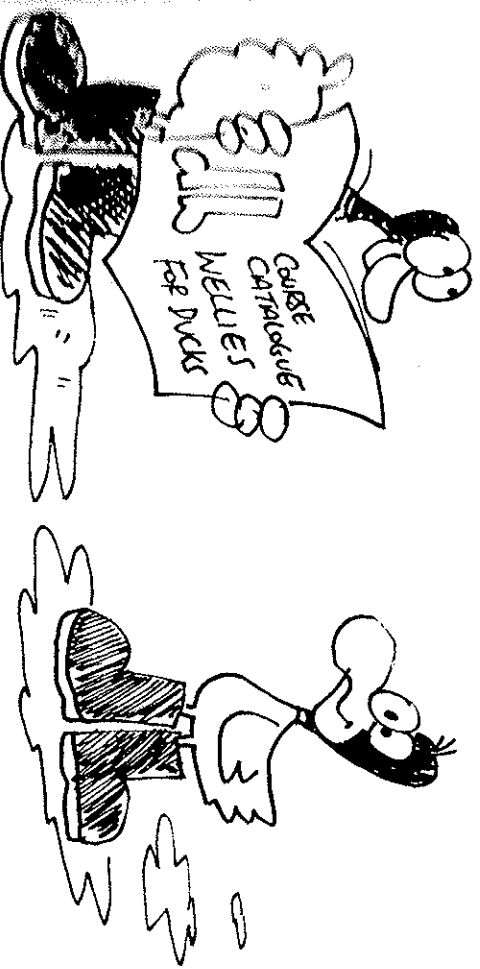
\_\_\_\_\_, *Opportunities for Adult Education*. London: Croom Helm, 1984.

## 2 Adult education in Ireland: an overview

*Adult education in Ireland is difficult to describe. If you ask someone "what is adult education?" they will often respond by asking a question in return, which is an indication that they are not really all that sure. "Hasn't that got to do with literacy and learning to read?" Sometimes people will respond by saying that it has to do with taking classes at night in the local technical school. Others will smile at you, as if you are slightly crazy, and ask "you mean going back to school?"*



When people see adult education merely in terms of literacy or night classes in their local vocational school, this leads to misunderstanding and confusion about what adult education involves. This misunderstanding also stems from the fact that adult education has a low status and priority in Ireland, as if somehow the notion of adults and education were incompatible. We tend to associate learning with something that we do when we are at school, college or university and that whatever we do as adults, it is not that. For some people, the notion of education for adults is almost as contradictory as the notion of wellingtons for ducks. This is a great shame, because as adults our survival depends upon our ability to learn and it should be as natural for us as it is for ducks to swim. We engage in learning in our everyday lives. It is very difficult not to learn something new every day. Many of us engage in formal and informal types of learning through books, tapes and courses. The sad thing is that those people who are excluded from education are the ones who have most to gain from it.



In some respects, adult education is misunderstood because it is so vast. It encompasses first, second and third levels. It takes in everything that one could or maybe should have learnt at school. It includes all the courses in the different colleges and universities.

But this is just the beginning, because adult education also includes all the various day and night time courses which are associated with vocational, community and comprehensive schools. There are hundreds of other providers of short term educational courses, many of which are commercial organisations. Finally, there is the whole area of learning done through distance learning techniques using tapes, videos, books and other written materials, as well as the learning done through educational programmes broadcast by radio and television. Given that up to 120,000 people formally register for adult education courses in vocational, community and comprehensive schools, and that this is only part of the picture, we can estimate that the number of adults taking part in formal education each year could be near to 200,000.

But why does adult education have such a low status and priority if there are so many people involved in it? Part of the reason is that, like the unemployed, the hundreds and thousands who participate in adult education are dispersed throughout the country. They are mainly isolated individual learners and small groups doing their own learning in their own time and in their own way. They do not feel any sense of unity. Most do not see the need or feel the urge to become organised. Adult education has a low status and priority because it has no coherent structure, no formal policy and inadequate funding.

Adult education takes place on an *ad hoc* basis in our cities, towns and villages. It is mainly organised on the strict market principle of supply meeting demand. Under the self-financing rule, a course is held only if a sufficient number of people, usually about twelve, are interested in participating, and are willing to pay enough in fees for a tutor and to cover other costs such as lighting, heating and caretaking.

There are many aspects of the existing system of adult education which need to be improved. For example, there is no official complaints procedure or possibility of recompense if people do not get satisfaction for their money. Participants should not expect to get their money back if the course is not up to standard. There is little advice or counselling available as to which educational courses or programmes are best suited to individual needs, interests and capabilities. Few courses receive any official recognition, either in the form of a certificate or diploma. Courses are generally done in isolation from each other with few possibilities of accumulating credits towards a diploma or certificate. Most courses are taught by people who have not been trained to teach adults and frequently take place in an environment which has been designed for children. It is hardly surprising then that up to one third give up their courses after a few weeks.

### HOW I HATED TUESDAYS

Tuesday was the day it all began. How I hated Tuesdays. It was that day of the week that the depressing journey had to be made to 'sign on' at the local unemployment exchange in Tallaght. This particular morning in August, the floor of the 'dole office' was littered with leaflets. One particular leaflet caught my attention and having picked it up, I read its contents. It offered the opportunity of further education under a new government scheme entitled the 'Adult Educational Opportunities Scheme.' I thought about it as the queue snaked its way around the four walls of the Labour and the idea began to appeal to me. I had always been an avid reader, probably the wrong books, but deep down I regretted not having stayed on at school when I was younger. Now the chance to return and pick up where I had left off presented itself.

That night I settled down with my new novel 'Animal Farm' and thoroughly enjoyed it, only to discover next day

in class that the pigs were not pigs at all but represented real people in Russian history. This totally confused me but bore out what I had always suspected - that one should not believe everything that one reads. The learning process had begun.

I would find myself reading material unrelated to the course itself. This I found highly stimulating and resented the lack of detail provided by the text books themselves. It was a more indepth knowledge that I sought.

Kenneth Martin, *Adult Learner*, Vol. 1, No. 3 1987, p.16.

Although tens of thousands of adults participate in and gain enormous benefit from adult education, it has a low status in terms of the funding and resources it receives from the government. Two government commissions have reported on adult education in the past twenty years, but there is still no real commitment to its development. The government provides educational services for its citizens until they finish school, college or university. But if for whatever reason, people are not able to make full use of these services the first time round, as adults they can expect little or no support from the government. For people who are unwaged or unemployed, there is little government support or incentive to become involved in education. Similarly there is little support for people who are working. In Ireland, workers get tax relief for looking after their bodies and paying for health insurance. They get no tax relief for looking after their minds through education. Indeed, this analogy between looking after one's health and looking after one's education can be taken further.

The success of the campaigns of the Health Education Bureau is that today people are far more conscious about their health. Instead of handing themselves over to their doctors, they are beginning to assume responsibility for their own health. But while this health consciousness is highly desirable and commendable,

are people as conscious about the need to look after their minds? Isn't there a danger in Ireland that we could end up as a society of healthy, fit, energetic people who, because of a lack of mental exercise and education have dull, lifeless minds?

We sometimes fail to remember that living in ignorance without knowledge, information and understanding can affect our lives just as badly as a diet of fried food, tobacco and alcohol. We need an Education Awareness Bureau in much the same way as we need a Health Education Bureau. We need to be reminded that a steady diet of tabloid newspapers, pop music, television soap operas, canned comedies and video nasties can damage people's lives just as much as a lack of exercise and a bad diet. Without knowledge and education people cannot gain effective control of their lives. We are well aware of the impact Government Health Warnings have had on reducing the consumption of cigarettes. Perhaps it would be a good idea if certain television programmes carried a Government Education Warning which said, for example, 'This programme can seriously damage your mind.' It would seem that in emphasising the need for fit healthy bodies, we have forgotten the need for mentally alert minds.

As the National Association for Adult Education, AONTAS promotes the concept of lifelong learning. In Ireland, we have an educational policy which is based on the belief that education is something that happens to people when they are young. In essence, we believe that education involves getting children into school, opening up their heads (if necessary by force), and pouring whatever knowledge and skills one can into them. Once this has been achieved they are, supposedly, set up for life.

This concept of education is dangerously inappropriate for the type of society in which we now live. It is out of date and out of place in a society in which there has been a rapid growth in science and technology and in which people have to adapt regularly to new types of work. The primary task of AONTAS is to promote

the notion of education as a life long process of learning and the need for everyone to maintain their knowledge, skills, information and critical awareness throughout their lives.

So how can this be done? The simple answer is by engaging in what the Kenny Commission report (1984) called 'systematic learning'. But 'systematic learning' about what? Well about a thousand and one things if one judges by the large range of subjects offered each year in various adult education centres throughout the country. One can take an adult education course, involving systematic learning, on a range of subjects from the accordion to zoology. But, as will be pointed out in the next chapter, all these various subjects can be divided into three different types of learning: (1) learning how to master and control things, (2) learning about ourselves and the community and society in which we live and (3) learning to reason and reflect critically about life and society.

As the Priority Areas in Adult Education report (AONNTAS, 1986) pointed out, 'critical learning' is the most important form of learning for adults. This may be seen as controversial because it seeks to promote discussion, reflection and questioning about existing systems of belief and behaviour. As we all know, when patterns of belief and behaviour become set and unquestioned they develop a power of their own. However, in order to make them relevant to people's needs and interests, they need to be evaluated regularly. This is what critical learning helps people achieve. It gives them the ability to know and understand what is happening in their lives. It is about developing the capacity within people to change their lives. It is about enabling. It is about empowerment. In this respect, knowledge is power.

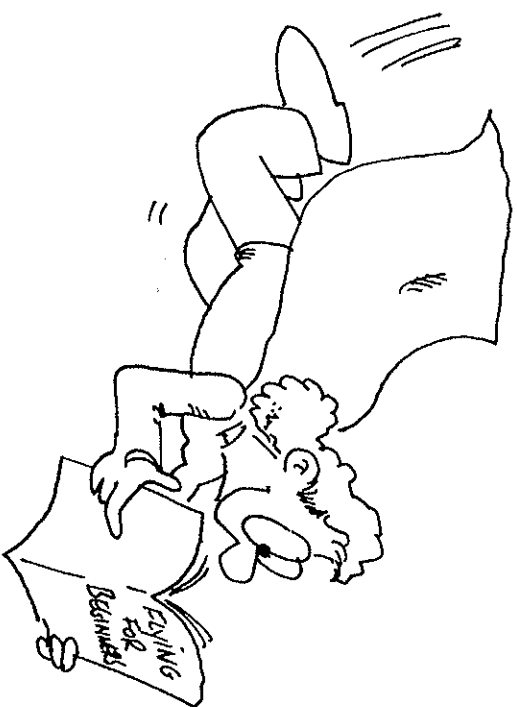
But before examining how adult education, in particular, can enable or empower people, it is necessary to look critically at what takes place within the education system as a whole. It is only then that we might be able to see in what way, and to what extent, adult education can be different.

Education in Ireland, and indeed elsewhere, is a bit like a merry-go-round. You have to be a certain age before you are entitled to get on. It is supposed to be free for about the first sixteen years, although if you want to get on a good safe horse on the inside track, you have to pay. Some people really enjoy the educational merry-go-round. They get a tremendous amount out of it, and end up full of enthusiasm and confidence in themselves. Others, perhaps because of family circumstances, an early fall or some other negative experience, or simply because they never got the hang of it, don't enjoy the merry-go-round at all. They feel dizzy and confused and make every excuse possible to get off as soon as they can. They close their eyes and ears and cannot wait until the whole thing has stopped. The problem, as we all know, is that once you get off the educational merry-go-round, it is very difficult to get back on again. In fact, the longer you stay on, the more self-confident you become and the easier it is for you to get on and off as you like.

Another problem is that unless you have enjoyed or got something out of the time you spent on the educational merry-go-round, it is unlikely that you will be able to get on the other merry-go-rounds which make up life. You are forced to stand on the outside and look in.

There are a number of things to say about the educational merry-go-round. In the first place, adult education is about allowing and encouraging people who did not enjoy or get anything out of the merry-go-round the first time, to have another go. Secondly, it is about developing people's self-confidence, first about themselves and then about education and learning. Thirdly, it is about providing them with a different merry-go-round, one which is their own and not simply the kiddies one which they use at night-time. Fourthly, it is about letting them go round at their own pace and being able to get on and off as they like. Finally, and perhaps most important of all, it is about getting people to ask themselves if a merry-go-round is in fact the best form of education either for themselves or for their children.

In order to understand the contribution which adult education can make to Irish society, it is important, then, to reflect critically about what takes place within the education system as a whole. It is through the education system that people learn discipline and self-control, develop a sense of personal worth, prestige and self-confidence. It is through the education system that most people develop the knowledge and skills necessary to get jobs, earn money and create wealth. Adult education is about enabling every adult to be self-confident, have a job, and to be healthy and self-sufficient. In this sense, it is about empowerment. But it is also about learning about why things are the way they are, why it is that some people have jobs and others do not, why some people are wealthy and others are poor and why some people are powerful and others are not.



## ADULT EDUCATION IN DENMARK: A MODEL FOR IRELAND

For many people adult education and Denmark are synonymous. There is a long tradition of participation and lifelong learning which dates back to the beginning of the last century and is associated with the Danish national hero, N.F.S Grundtvig, a radical Lutheran clergyman, theologian and poet. Grundtvig was the leading figure in the development of *Folkeoplysning*. This is a particularly Danish concept meaning 'popular enlightenment' or general adult education. It has its roots in the social movements of the nineteenth century and believes in bringing power to the people. It is the process by which ordinary people are enabled through adult education programmes to develop their own culture and position in society.

Denmark has a population of 5.1 million people and it is estimated that up to 35% of adults take part in some educational course each year. It is difficult to specify how much is spent on adult education in Denmark; what is spent depends on how many people participate in courses. For most adult education courses the State pays one third, the local authority one third and the participants the final third of the cost. Throughout the 1980's the amount spent on adult education was generally about 6% of the total education budget. Adult education is now the main responsibility of the Ministry for Culture which in 1989 had a budget of £400 million.

In recent years, Denmark has been going through an economic crisis centred around a large national debt. This economic crisis was associated with a cultural crisis involving the disappearance of traditionally held beliefs, values and practices and an ecological crisis centred on the destruction of the environment. The economic crisis was tackled by reducing public expenditure.

Although the overall funds for health, social welfare and education were reduced, the Danish government increased the funds

available for adult education and developed a challenging and innovative ten point programme in order to ensure a better system. Central to this programme was the creation of innovative projects and experiments in adult education. This was done by making available £10 million in grants to grass roots groups to develop new courses and programmes over a three year period from 1985. In all, 457 projects received funding. In Denmark, then, when there is a crisis in the State you go back to the people for they are ultimately the ones who have the knowledge and know-how to solve the crisis.

But there are other major developments in the ten point programme of adult education. There is to be a new curriculum and examination for adults involved in second chance education, i.e. they would not have to study for and sit the equivalent of their Leaving Certificate. There is to be more funds made available for adults to take part in adult education programmes, especially for those not previously involved very much in education. There is to be paid educational leave from work which in the longterm would become a statutory right for all workers. There is to be greater emphasis on properly trained adult education tutors. There is to be special provision for the constant research and development necessary to create and sustain a vibrant, adult education programme in Denmark.

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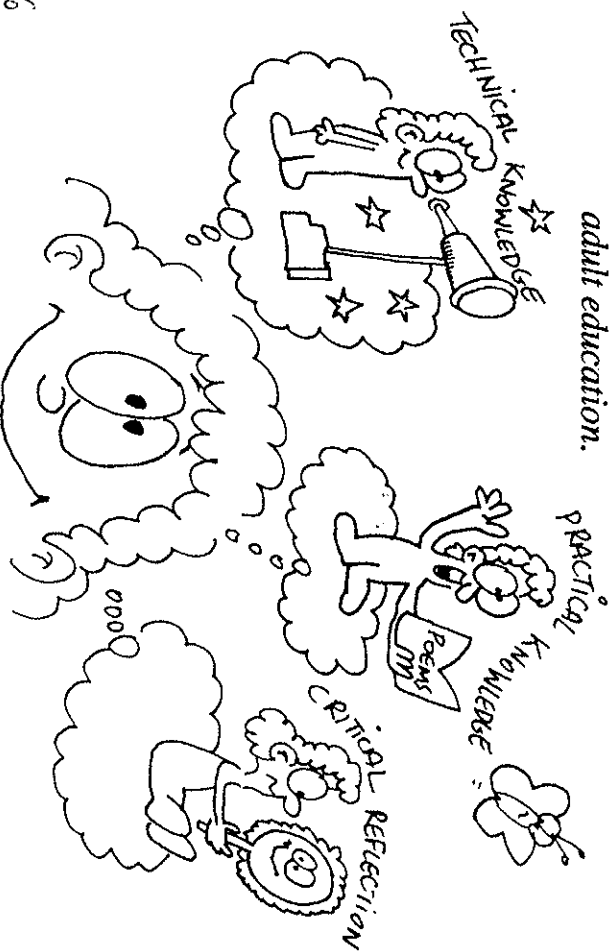
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### 3 A Theoretical Foundation for Adult Education

*Adult education in Ireland has come to include a wide and diverging mass of activities, agencies and settings. One way of helping to clarify this picture is to focus for a while on the concept of adult learning. The aim of this chapter is to map out what adult learning might mean. Unless such a map is developed which helps classify and clarify all that is going on in adult education in Ireland, there will continue to be a misunderstanding of what adult learning involves and consequently, gaps in provision and an absence of good policies. This map of adult learning is the first step in providing a framework for thinking about adult education.*



In order to realise what adult education is about, it is necessary to understand that there are basically three different types of knowledge or ways of getting to know the world.

The first is technical knowledge. It involves being able to control and manipulate our physical environment. For example, a motor mechanic knows that when an engine is properly tuned and when all the mechanical parts are set and adjusted to the manufacturer's specifications, the car will go. On a grander scale the astronomer is able to predict the return of Halley's comet because the astronomer has technical ways of knowing the universe and the way it functions. This way of knowing the world is a direct result of our interest in gaining control over the material world. It leads to freedom of an important kind. It allows us to survive and improve the quality of life through farming, medicine, computers, etc. Each generation inherits this store of technical knowledge. The school subjects of physics, chemistry, computer science and biology are good examples of how we engage in this way of knowing the world.

The second way of getting to know the world is through practical knowledge. It involves not so much the control and manipulation of events but the understanding of communications between people. This communication ranges from body language and gestures to spoken language and literature. The poet and the historian concentrate on understanding people and the way they communicate. The writer of the novel gives an insight into the human condition, its complexity, diversity, ambiguities and dilemmas. All this increases our understanding of life and each other. It also leads to freedom of a different kind. This kind of freedom is from misunderstanding and personal isolation. Examples of disciplines which lead to this kind of knowledge are history, law, psychology, literature, art, philosophy and sociology.

The third way of knowing the world is through critical reflection. Because this concept of knowledge is more difficult to grasp than either of the other two, it is worth spending a little time exploring it in some detail.

Just as the first two ways of knowing the world are a result of the human interest in control and understanding respectively, so the third way is the result of another interest. But the interest here is in freedom or emancipation. In this case freedom is sought from the forces which limit the range of options or choices we can make. These forces can come from our unconscious mind, from political, economic and social institutions or from the environment. They limit the amount of control people have over their lives. The important point is that people frequently take it for granted that these forces are beyond their control.

An example is the feeling of inferiority, lack of confidence and hesitation one can experience in the presence of another person who is assumed to have a great deal more authority and power. By critically rethinking their life history, people might well discover that the roots of their inadequacy arise from their early meetings with 'superior' beings in the shape of parents and other figures of authority. From this early learning people generalise about all authority figures and only slowly can these sometimes false assumptions be questioned.

Critical analysis can also be made of society in general. Marx, for example, defined ideology as false-ideas we can have about society and life which help the ruling class perpetuate its dominance. It makes the status quo, unemployment, injustices, ignorance and illiteracy appear as a legitimate state of affairs, as only natural and reasonable. The critique of ideology is the process by which one becomes aware of this false situation and takes steps to change it.

This way of knowing the world is through a process of critical reflection. A dramatic personal and social change takes place when people become aware of the way ideologies (racial, political, economic, religious, cultural and sexual) have created or contributed

to their dependence on powers which they thought were benign, natural and in their best interests.

In modern industrial society, the technical way of understanding the world has a monopoly over what it means to know. This kind of knowledge is valued more than others and frequently to the exclusion of the others. The knowledge gleaned as a result of our technical interest in control and manipulation frequently leads to an eclipse in society of other ways of knowing.

Keeping in mind each of the three ways of investigating the world which have been described, it could be suggested that corresponding to each way there is a kind of learning being described.

To begin with, the first way of knowing suggests a kind of learning which is technical and skill oriented. It is a kind of learning which concentrates on achieving control over the physical world and developing the skills necessary to function in an increasingly technical society. The teaching and learning methods which facilitate this kind of learning are demonstration and practical work. These are familiar to anyone who has learned a skill whether it is typing or car mechanics. Training courses for unemployed people, usually through FÁS, concentrate on this kind of learning to a great extent. It is an important and essential kind of learning and allows people to develop the skills necessary to progress in their job or find a job in the first instance. But the danger is that in our educational system far too much emphasis is placed on this kind of learning to the exclusion of the two other kinds of learning.

We live in an information-rich society. We are constantly bombarded with messages. As new techniques emerge and promise even more channels thrusting data at the population, it is apparent that the public needs to develop an increasing capacity to discriminate among sources and to learn to assess critically the information received. Adult education has a mission to promote critical attitudes among men, women and children acting as consumers, users of mass media, citizens and members of their communities.

*Summary Commission on Report, Lifelong Learning, 1996, p. 24*

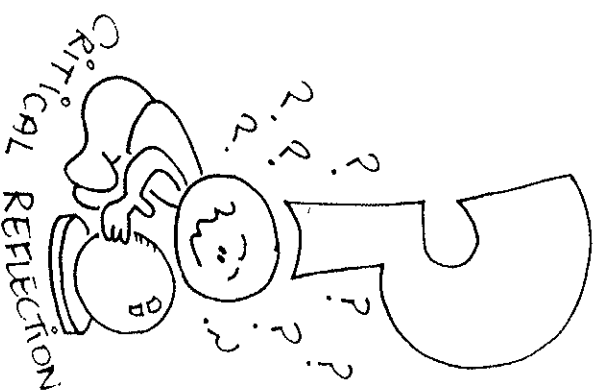
A literacy scheme involved in both these kinds of learning would be interested in the following. Firstly, in terms of teaching or learning new skills it would be concerned about reading and writing, manipulating figures and learning the ability to function in society. Secondly, it would attempt to provide opportunities for students to study literature, history, law, social studies. It would provide opportunities for students to relate to each other, to focus on personal, social, economic and political issues and to facilitate their full participation in society. Life and social skills and communication studies at their best involve this kind of learning. Such courses value the growth and development of the individual, the ability to make friends, improve the quality of ones' relationships, foster leadership and increase self-confidence and self-awareness. Good adult tutors will be skilled in the teaching methods which facilitate this learning. These include discussion groups, case studies, role-play, simulation games and seminars. All of these provide opportunities to share opinions, exchange perceptions, question and see things from the perspective of the other person.

The argument being presented here is as follows. Adult education is interested in both these kinds of learning. The first kind of learning is frequently overvalued and the second devalued. Because skill learning is more easily measured, funding and sponsoring agencies will require objectives to be set exclusively in behavioural terms. After all, they argue, it is possible to judge whether a plumber can repair a broken tap by seeing him or her in action. Unfortunately, it is not as easy to quantify the second kind of learning which is about awareness and understanding one's self and others.

There is a third kind of learning in which an adult becomes aware of and questions a whole range of political, economic, cultural, psychological and religious assumptions which were previously accepted uncritically. It involves becoming aware through reflection and discussion of how one's attitudes and values are devel-

oped. This type of learning is different from the second kind in a significant way. History or psychology, the law or the study of literature give meaning to events within a particular framework. In contrast, the process of critical reflection asks whether the framework itself is adequate.

An example can be taken from education. Some women today find themselves torn between the traditionally defined roles of wife, mother, and home maker on the one hand and the possibility of independence and career on the other. This third kind of learning involves not only changing roles but also changing the context within which the roles are defined. Many women see that it is not sufficient to join the job market without also attempting to change the patriarchal structures which constantly ascribe inferiority to women. These structures allow only the emergence of a certain range of roles and relationships and a critical awareness sees the need to work structurally to change the framework or paradigm. It can be argued that unless adult education allows for this kind of learning to happen it is not anywhere near fully realising the student's potential for critical and reflective thinking.



In the area of literacy, the work of Paulo Freire gives the best description of what learning for critical consciousness looks like in a developing country situation. Other educators have described what that kind of learning might look like in the U.S., Great Britain and Ireland. The process described by Freire is one of learning through dialogue with sympathetic educators to perceive the economic, political, social and cultural causes of their predicament. The invitation extended by the educator to the learner is to believe in themselves and expel myths which are maintained and legitimated by current social structures and relations.

Educators speak a great deal about responding to the needs of the learner. The third kind of learning and the critical comments to which it leads have important implications for the idea that expressed learning needs are the major target for educators. If we operate within a horizon of myths or a galaxy of assumptions, then our real needs will not be so easily identified.

What is needed is the opportunity to participate in a discussion freely and without coercion from myths and delusions. This is exactly what is attempted in groups which work toward critical consciousness. Their real needs are those they would have if they were freed of a belief system based, in the case of women's groups, on sex roles defined by men. Real needs are those we would form if we had more perfect knowledge and freedom. The liberating process of this critical learning is the mission of adult education.

So beyond the ability to act skillfully and the ability to act with understanding and empathy there is the ability to act critically. This is the ability to question the assumptions on which one's skills and acts of understanding are based. It involves identifying their origins, searching for new assumptions and the difficult task of acting on the basis of new and more adequate ones. In this way adult autonomy, freedom and responsibility are possible.

Three distinct but not unrelated kinds of learning have been identified. Each has its own aims and methods. The transformation suggested by critical learning will allow individuals to renegotiate personal relationships, to remake the conditions in which people work and live and inject into these situations a new level of personal significance. Added to this is the real possibility of changing oppressive social forms.

This kind of learning is controversial because it is against the one dimensional learning beloved of training agencies. It is against the conventionally accepted wisdom about how one should be. It is a threat to the culture which constructs for us belief systems, value frameworks and codes of behaviour which are not necessarily in one's interests. It opens the sometimes frightening and often painful possibility that all can be made new. Collectively change can happen. It is against common sense. It may lead to profound personal change and political engagements. But the reward is a life lived wide awake. The uncritical life is not worth living. To merit the title adult education, a programme or course has to provide opportunities for all three kinds of learning to take place, especially emancipatory learning.

## Summary

The aim of this chapter has been to provide some overall understanding of the different types of learning involved in adult education. We have suggested that there are three types of learning:

1. Learning how to master and control things. This is usually understood as learning a new skill or competency. It can involve anything from learning how to fix your car to operating a computer. This is the traditional view of what adult education is about. It is a major form of adult learning that has grown beyond the hobby and leisure type course to include occupational training and re-training as well as the whole area of in-service training.
2. Learning about ourselves and the community and society in which we live, as well as, perhaps, other societies and cultures. This type of learning includes learning languages, history, politics, economics, sports, music and other aspects of culture.
3. Learning to reason and reflect about life and the society and culture in which we live. This type of learning includes the key element of critical reflection. There is a movement away from treating knowledge as a matter of learning facts, to reasoning and questioning as to why things are the way they are. This kind of learning includes a variety of social and personal development type courses in which people learn to question who they are, and why their lives and society are the way they are.

There is a gradual shift taking place within adult education away from a demand for technical and skill training type courses, to courses which help people reason and reflect about their lives. What is suggested from the analysis in this chapter is that elements of critical learning should be incorporated into specific skill or technical training. This would be a move beyond the type of social and personal skill training which is already incorporated into many training programmes.

The conclusion of elements of critical learning into all courses and programmes is but one of the changes necessary for the development of a better system of adult education in Ireland. Before suggesting what other changes need to be made, we will identify and describe what is happening at present.

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## 4 Structure and Organisation

*It is difficult to describe the existing system of adult education in Ireland. Yet the aim of this chapter is to try to provide for those unfamiliar with it some kind of picture of its structure and organisation. We have decided to do this by trying to answer some of the common questions asked about adult education. Who provides the courses? What kind of courses are provided? Who pays for them? Who does the teaching? Who certifies the courses? Who participates? How many participate? Who promotes participation? Following this broad description, we look in more detail at three specific issues which we feel are crucial with regard to adult education in Ireland; funding, tutors and training, facilities and resources.*



We do not claim that our description of what is going on in adult education in Ireland is comprehensive. Even if this were possible we would need a lot more space to do so. But this report has not been written for the specialist reader who will spot what is missing. It has been written for the more general reader who wishes to familiarise himself or herself with adult education and the issues and problems involved in its promotion and development.

### 1. PROVISION

#### Who Provides the Courses?

Most adult education courses in Ireland are provided through state agencies and institutions. The main statutory providers are the Vocational Education Committees and a number of the Community and Comprehensive Schools established since the early 1970s. Voluntary secondary schools, universities, regional technical colleges, and colleges of technology also provide adult education courses. Other agencies which provide specific types of adult education courses include FÁS, Teagasc, Rehabilitation Institute, RTE, Regional Health Boards, Health Promotion Unit, public libraries, museums and art galleries, Irish language organisations, the Dublin Institute of Adult Education, the People's College, youth organisations, the College of Industrial Relations, development agencies, churches, the Irish Country Women's Association, the Council for Status of Women, Macra na Feirme and various commercial organisations, trade unions, professional bodies and associations. Finally, there are a number of non-formal, voluntary groups ranging from women's study groups and creative writing groups to traveller's education and unemployment action groups, which are engaged in providing adult education courses.

Providers are mainly responsible for organising and advertising their own courses. Within the VEC system this is usually done by Adult Education Organisers, fifty of whom were appointed in 1979. School principals or teachers holding posts of responsibility

for adult education look after provision in the individual schools. Courses are organised on an *ad hoc*, local basis and there is an attempt by the providers and organisers to match the anticipated demand with the potential supply of learners and tutors. There is then, as with any product, a continual attempt to test-and-try the market to see which courses will pay for themselves.

Following the Kenny Commission Report *Lifelong Learning*, Adult Education Boards were established in each VEC area in 1984. There are twelve members of each board. The recommended membership of the Board is two from the VEC, one from Teagasc, FÁS and the library authority; and seven from other organisations involved in adult education. Boards can also appoint three observers.

The main functions of the Boards are to assess the educational needs of adults in the area, prepare a suitable programme of courses and activities, financially administer the programme and to prepare an annual report for the VEC and the Minister for Education. Adult Education Boards are also mainly involved in the allocation of funds made available through the Adult Literacy and Community Education Budget for Disadvantaged Groups.

## FUNCTIONS OF ADULT EDUCATION ORGANISERS

- To identify the educational needs of adults in the area
  - To examine existing provision of adult education courses and facilities
  - To suggest possible areas of co-operation between agencies and services engaged in the provision of adult education
  - To prepare for the VEC Adult Education Sub-Committee a draft annual programme of adult education activities
  - To organise the programme as approved by the VEC Adult Education Sub-Committee and by the VEC
  - To provide an information and advisory service on adult education courses and facilities
  - To co-operate with other local statutory voluntary organisations, especially those with a particular interest in adult education
  - To prepare an annual report on the adult education programme for the VEC and the Minister for Education
  - To liaise with local economic interests in relation to the organisation of courses for the provision of skills needed for local development
- Kenny Commission report (1984), p.161.

### **What Kinds of Courses are Provided?**

There is a wide variety of adult education courses ranging from once-off, short-term courses to long-term degree courses. Most short-term courses last approximately ten weeks, deal with a specific subject and do not lead to any recognised qualification. These are the more traditional hobby, leisure and commercial type courses. Other courses involve some kind of examination either at second or third level leading to certificates, diplomas or degrees. Another important element of adult education has been the provision of literacy and basic education courses which vary in length depending on the needs of the individual. More recently, there has been a growth in social and personal development type courses in which participants may engage in the type of critical learning described in the previous chapter in order to gain a better understanding of themselves and the society in which they live.

### **Who Pays for the Courses ?**

The vast majority of people who take adult education courses pay for what they get. Nearly all the courses provided through state agencies are based on a strict self-financing rule. This demands that all the costs of providing the courses, including lighting, heating and administrative costs as well as the tutors' pay, must be covered by participants' fees. Courses which are designated as second chance learning, e.g., Leaving Certificate Courses, must bring in 30 per cent of the total cost of the course. Sometimes participants' fees, e.g. those dependent on social welfare payments, are subsidised by the State through schemes such as the Educational Opportunities Scheme and the Adult Literacy and Community Education Budget. But generally, for the majority of courses, even the poorest adults have to pay for themselves.

### **Who Does the Teaching?**

There are specific guidelines and regulations concerning who is eligible to teach in state-funded schools and colleges, but these do not apply to adult education. Basically, anyone can teach an adult education course as long as they can persuade enough adults to participate and pay the fee. In many European countries it is necessary to have a certificate or diploma in teaching adults before one is allowed to give an adult education course. This is because teaching adults is very different from teaching children. In Ireland, there are very few training programmes for adult educators, and there are no official requirements or qualifications necessary to teach adults.

### **Who Certifies the Courses?**

Very few adult education courses are formally recognised. They do not receive a certificate or diploma from the major awarding institutions such as the National Council for Educational Awards, or the Universities. Indeed very few adult education courses in Ireland are linked into a system whereby they count as a unit (or credit) towards a nationally recognised certificate or diploma. The most common certified course for which adults study is the Leaving Certificate – specifically designed as an examination for school-children finishing full-time second level education. Universities and other third-level institutions have traditionally provided intensive evening degree programmes and more recently, the National Distance Education Centre, Dublin City University has been providing modular based courses in Information Technology. Degrees in Business Studies and Public Administration are available through Regional Technical Colleges and the Institute of Public Administration.

The N.C.E.A. (National Council for Educational Awards) has introduced an accessible and flexible form of credited learning which has implications for adult education in Ireland. This involves

adults being able to obtain nationally and internationally recognised certificates, diplomas and degrees for each course or part of a course they complete.

### **How Many People Take Part in Adult Education?**

Tens of thousands of people participate in adult education courses in Ireland every year. In 1985/86, of the estimated 200,000 participants, 120,000 adults took part in courses provided by VECs and Community and Comprehensive schools. Thousands more would have taken courses in universities, third-level colleges, in adult education centres such as the People's College and the Dublin Institute of Adult Education and in various secondary schools.

More still would have participated in courses provided by groups and organisations mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. It is reasonable, therefore, to assume that if all these courses are taken into account, that up to 200,000 people take part in adult education in Ireland each year. This is almost three times the amount that take part in third-level education.

### **Who Participates in Adult Education?**

All types of people participate; from the young to the elderly, from those living in rural areas to those living in cities, from those who cannot read or write to those with university degrees. However, women are much more likely to participate than men. In 1985/86, annual returns from providers to the Department of Education indicate that almost seven in ten (69%) of those taking courses through the VECs and Community and Comprehensive Schools were women.

The survey on adult education carried out by the Kenny Commission (1984) found that participants were also more likely to be in the 25-44 age group; from a city; full-time employed and have done the Leaving Certificate.

While the higher levels of participation by women are welcome and praiseworthy, the low level of participation by men, especially those who are unemployed, is a cause of concern. AONTAS is particularly concerned about the lack of participation of the long-term unemployed in adult education. Despite attempts such as the Educational Opportunities Scheme and the FÁS Community Enterprise Programme, more needs to be done by the Government to actively support and encourage the unemployed to engage in education. There are more barriers to access than there are open welcoming doors and systems of support.

### **How Is Adult Education Publicised?**

The vast majority of adult education courses in Ireland are run on a commercial basis in that courses are only put on if they attract sufficient numbers of people willing to pay the fees to cover the costs involved. Adult education is a very valuable service to the community, but it is forced to compete in the market place against highly advertised consumer goods. There is no budget for publicity and the problem is that the more money spent on advertising and publicity, the higher will be the cost of courses.

Most providers publicise their courses on a local basis by producing a leaflet or booklet or by placing advertisements in local newspapers. The standard of these publications and advertisements varies enormously. Very few providers can afford to advertise on television or radio. The Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA) advertising campaign to encourage participation in adult education was discontinued in 1988.

The best information about adult education courses is offered through the local Adult Education Organisers and other providers. There are two guides to adult education courses in the Dublin area: *The Guide to Evening Classes* published by Wolfhound Press and *Evening Classes* published by Mentor publications. AONTAS and the IVEA also promote various events during September to encourage participation in courses.

### Who Promotes Adult Education?

The promotion of adult education in general is carried out by AONTAS, NALA, (The National Adult Literacy Agency), the IVEA and various university departments. These institutions also carry out research which is essential to the development of good policies and plans. Most of the providers also promote their own courses. There have also been two important Government Commissions concerning the development of adult education in Ireland: the Murphy Report (1973) "Adult Education In Ireland" and the Kenny Report (1984) "Lifelong Learning".

Adult education in Ireland is underdeveloped. It does not have a coherent structure. There are no definite policies or plans for its future development. In comparison with other sectors of education it receives a miniscule amount of state funding. All of this is in stark contrast to many other European countries where the contribution of adult education to social and economic development is well recognised and there is a genuine commitment to the concept of lifelong learning. Both the Murphy (1973) and Kenny (1984) Commissions suggested structures for the development of adult education, but only bits and pieces of their recommendations have been implemented. However, one of the main problems facing adult education is a lack of funds, for unless there is adequate funding a coherent structure cannot be developed and adult education will continue to grow in an *ad hoc*, irregular manner.

Another problem facing adult education is that it is more oriented in image and practice towards the middle classes following hobby and leisure pursuits than as a direct means towards improving their life chances. Often those who have most to gain from participation, i.e., the poor, the disadvantaged and the less-well educated, tend to be excluded. Their lack of participation could be overcome by a more attractive curriculum directly suited to their needs and interests, a more attractive environment and by courses given by trained adult educators. However, the main obstacle is

the cost of the courses. Participation by the less well-off in adult education will continue to decline as long as the strict self-financing rule is maintained.

There are thousands of adults in Ireland who exclude themselves from adult education because they have vague and inaccurate information. They also feel that adult education is not relevant to their needs. AONTAS sees the promotion of adult education as one of its major tasks – to make people aware of the range and quality of what is available throughout the country and to encourage people to participate. But local publicity which describes what happens in adult education courses also needs to be carried out.

### What Needs to be Done?

1. The Government should devise and implement a cohesive and coherent policy for the development of adult education in Ireland.
2. Part of any new policy for adult education should be the introduction of a clear and definite administrative structure regarding all aspects of adult education.
3. A clearly defined administrative structure should clarify the relationships between the State and the voluntary and the commercial sectors within adult education. Within the statutory sector the role and function of, among others, Adult Education Boards, Adult Education Organisers, VECs and Community and Comprehensive Schools should also be clarified.
4. Every practical method should be tried to increase the participation of disadvantaged groups and individuals. This could include direct support measures such as fee subsidies or indirect support mechanisms such as pay-as-you-learn schemes.

## 2. FUNDING

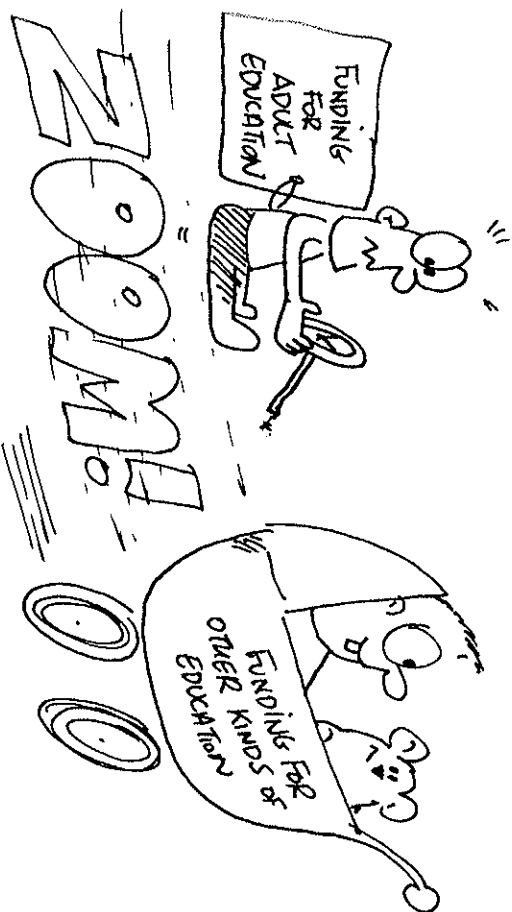
Education is one of the government departments which has a very large budget at its disposal. Its expenditure in 1987 was £1.166 billion. Out of this budget adult education received approximately one-sixth of one per cent (0.16%). It is obvious from this that life-long learning is not a priority for the Government.

### GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURE ON ADULT EDUCATION FOR 1987

	£
Expenditure by VECs on tuition fees (pay only)	1,325,729
Education Opportunities Scheme:	
Co. Dublin VEC	15,285
Co. Limerick VEC	29,425
Literacy & Community Education	400,000
Grant-in-Aid to Adult Education Organisations	157,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,927,439</b>
Total expenditure on education	1,165,592,993
Specific expenditure on adult education as % total expenditure on education	0.165%

Source: Dail reply, 15 June 1988

Adult education is predominantly self-financing which means that the core costs of provision including tuition fees, materials, and publicity must be covered from course fees. In effect this means that the viability of courses depends on numbers enrolling. It also means that as costs of provision increase so to do the fees paid by adult students.



### Are There Exceptions to the Self-Financing Rule?

Some courses are exempt from the strict application of the self-financing rule, e.g. second chance education courses which are expected to raise 30% of the total costs from fees. This is a fairly recent development designed to make such courses accessible to those who missed out on educational opportunities first time round and who can least afford to pay.

Other activities such as the Educational Opportunities Scheme and activities promoted through the Adult Literacy and Community Education Budget are also exempt from a strict self-financing

rule. This budget is in its fourth year of existence and currently stands at £500,000. It is expected to finance adult literacy and community education projects for the whole country.

It is important to point out that many literacy and community education activities depend on a large pool of volunteer labour, and are frequently dependent for their continuing survival on surpluses generated by other fee paying courses. This means that their existence from year to year is precarious and has to rely on the demand for other adult education courses.

In day-time education much of the energy of organising groups is expended in fund raising activities for basic necessities such as creches.

The single largest item of expenditure within the Adult Education Budget is the salaries of Adult Education Organisers. In 1979, fifty Adult Education Organisers were appointed by VECs to organise and publicise adult education. The AEO is the key figure in Adult Education provision as he/she is the only salaried full-time person with responsibility in this area. A number of AEO posts which have become vacant in recent years have not been filled. This has meant that adult education provision has seriously diminished and in some areas has completely disappeared.

### **What needs to be done?**

1. The development of adult education should be based on sound policies which are promoted through the allocation of adequate and realistic funding.
2. Adult Education for Disadvantaged Groups should be provided at minimal cost, or at a cost that would not be a financial burden.

3. The self-financing principle should be dramatically changed from the formula currently used, i.e., tuition plus thirty per cent = income from students. In the case of second chance and basic education it should be eliminated altogether.

4. Adult Education Organisers should be appointed where vacancies exist.

5. All providers of adult education and all agencies should in a co-ordinated way lobby government for adequate funding.

6. The Educational Opportunities Scheme should be extended, not just physically throughout the country, as is already beginning to happen, but also expanded to provide opportunities beyond the Leaving Certificate.

### **3. TUTORS AND TEACHING**

One of the characteristics of adult education is that it is almost exclusively staffed by part-time teachers and volunteers. This is because the majority of adult education courses are confined to a few hours a week for a limited number of weeks in the year. The majority of teachers therefore, are appointed for a term or session and employment is largely determined by student numbers.

Recruitment of tutors is an unplanned process. Generally it depends on finding someone with some knowledge or expertise in a particular area. Many adult tutors are school-teachers, while others are drawn from a range of business, social, cultural and religious organisations.

## Is There a Career Structure for Adult Educators?

Because of the low status of adult education which is reflected in the amount of funding it receives, there is no established career structure for tutors. Nor are there promotional opportunities or salary scales available which would attract people who are interested in making a career in adult education. The part-time nature of the work means that there is little opportunity to build up experience and expertise. Consequently, adult education continues to be largely dependent on part-time teachers. It is important, therefore, that the quality of their work is developed and supported through adequate training and funding.

When you are going to school you always look at a teacher as somebody higher than you, and they know a lot more.

Now the teacher is more of a friend. It is not somebody in authority that you have to keep quiet for. The teachers put you at ease. You are at ease yourself, and you get to know other people in the class better.

I think there is a great need to have teachers who can specifically teach adults. I think it is quite different to teaching children. We were very lucky with Isobel Moore, she had experience, she had been an adult student herself. We came across other teachers in the school who are very good for children, but they didn't come across right for adults.

*AONTAS Live and Learn, p. 39.*

## Who Trains Adult Educators in Ireland?

Training of adult educators is conspicuous by its absence in this country. The lack of importance attached to it is based on the false assumption that people trained to teach children can apply

their particular expertise to the teaching of adults. There is also an assumption that people with a high level of knowledge of a particular subject can naturally impart this to other people. Apart from the literacy schemes and some other organisations, e.g. Teagasc, FÁS, ICA, Youth Organisations, no training opportunities exist. Some tutors who are involved in the teaching of groups of adults take steps to improve their skills through attendance at courses such as those run by the Department of Adult and Community Education in St Patrick's College, Maynooth or through attendance at occasional seminars and workshops organised by some adult education providers or community groups.

An additional problem is that many tutors themselves do not realise the importance of training. They continue to teach courses along traditional lines using a lecture method which does not allow for real student participation. Furthermore, adult education tutors rarely get a chance to meet one another let alone discuss issues.

### What Needs to be Done

1. While the great majority of teachers will continue to be volunteers or employed on a part-time basis, there should be a core of trained full-time staff to provide them with support, guidance and training.
2. Within adult education there should be career structures with opportunities, promotion and salaries which will attract the right people.
3. The methodology used in the teaching of adults should be clearly distinguished from that used in the teaching of children. Tutors engaged in adult education should have access to initial and on-going training opportunities.

4. Participation in training programmes should be part and parcel of the conditions of employment of all tutors. These programmes should include a thorough grounding in the philosophy and principles of adult learning as well as the psychological, social and practical needs of adult students.
5. Accredited courses in the teaching of adult education should be developed in order to help tutors adopt a more professional approach to their work and capitalise on their existing teaching experience.

#### 4. FACILITIES AND RESOURCES

##### What Premises Are Available for Adult Education?

Most adult education courses take place in vocational, community and comprehensive schools. Very few voluntary secondary or primary schools are available for adult learning. Providers of adult training programmes such as FÁS or the Rehabilitation Institute use their own specially provided centres. Other centres used for adult education include third-level colleges, libraries, community centres, church premises, centres for the unemployed and even private houses. Some centres such as the Dublin Institute of Adult Education, an Grianan (ICA centre in Termonfeckin) Pearse College, Crumlin, People's College, Parnell Square, Waterford Adult Education Centre and Kiltfinane Education Centre are specifically designed as adult education centres.

Obviously the ideal setting for adult education courses would be specially designed centres where adults can participate in a variety of activities centred around learning and socialising. While school premises may not be the most appropriate setting for adult education courses, schools are nevertheless the only places which

provide the specialist teaching rooms, workshops and equipment which are essential to many adult education courses. Large amounts of public money are spent on schools, so it is essential that maximum use be made of their facilities. Community schools in particular were established to have a community dimension and involvement so it is important that adult education activities are included as part and parcel of the services they offer. This will include extra expenditure to provide adequate caretaking, heating and additional maintenance costs generated by increased use of accommodation.

Where adult education courses take place in a school some adults end up sitting at small tables and chairs designed for children. Very few centres have creche or canteen facilities. Most adult students only have access to the facilities provided during class time and usually have no further contact with the places in which they learn. Adult students need to have an identity of their own especially when they share premises used for young people. For many adults, developing the social aspect of their education is an essential ingredient in the creation of this identity.

##### Is There Access to Necessary Equipment?

Schools in which adult education courses take place will usually have available a range of publicly funded equipment. The level and type of equipment will vary from centre to centre. But even where equipment is available it does not necessarily mean that it will be accessible to people taking adult education courses. Control over equipment, such as videos, cameras, recorders, photocopyers, etc is mainly exercised by day school staff, and so it is often locked away at night when most courses take place. Supervised access to this equipment is not available to adults in the same way as it is to children.

### Are There Special Adult Learning Materials?

Resources necessary for full and varied adult education courses extend beyond the range of equipment available in schools or adult education centres. There are few teaching and learning materials specifically designed for adult students. Furthermore, there are no funds available to employ staff who would assist students and tutors in developing such materials.

### What Other Resources are Available?

Public libraries are an important adult education resource. They are often willing to co-operate with adult education organisers by extending access to their facilities, but in general libraries are underdeveloped as centres of adult learning. Libraries attached to third level institutions are usually not accessible to the majority of adult learners. There are other examples of public facilities, e.g. museums and galleries which are under-utilised for adult education courses.

### What Needs to be Done?

1. Accommodation for adult education should be provided during the day as well as in the evening.
2. The provision of creche facilities for adult education courses is essential, especially for day-time courses which attract young parents.
3. In the next ten years the school going population will begin to decline leaving behind valuable buildings purpose built for education. Long-term planning should include the conversion of some of the more suitable buildings into adult education centres.

4. In many European countries, particularly Denmark, attendance at residential centres for a weekend or longer forms a major part of adult education provision. The feasibility of more residential adult education provision in Ireland should be examined.

5. Educational equipment and technology which is publicly funded for use in day schools should be made available to adult educators and students.

6. The production of relevant material specifically designed for adult students making use of multi-media approaches should be explored.

7. Opportunities for training and supporting those who are engaged in the use and development of teaching resources should be provided.

### Further reading

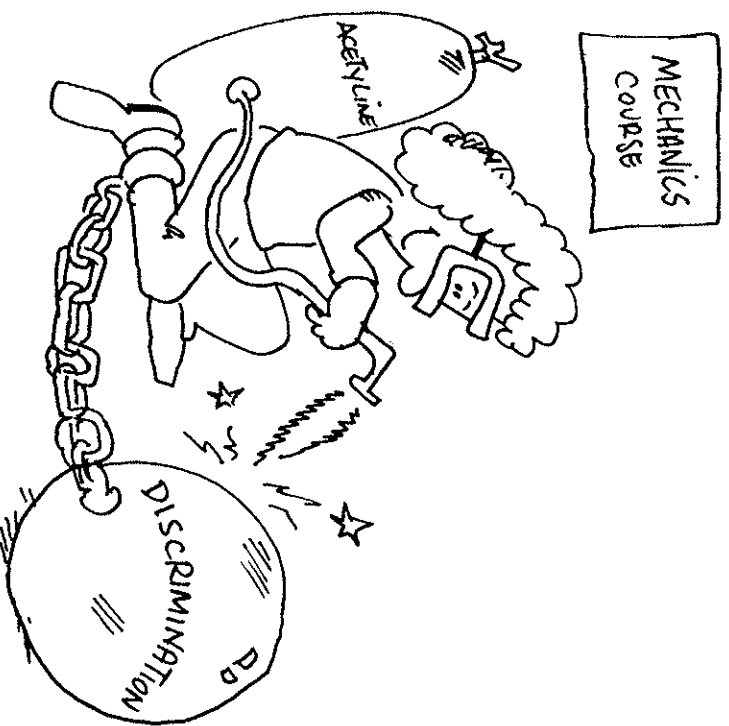
*Guide to Evening Classes.* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1989).

*Evening Classes.* (Dublin: Mentor, 1989).

*Learning to Teach, Teaching to Learn.* Report of the Working Party on the Training and Staff Development of Teachers in Continuing Education, presented to the Northern Ireland Council for Continuing Education, 1985.

## 5 Priority Groups and Special Areas

*Among the two hundred thousand adults who participate in courses each year, there are a number of distinct groups which because of their circumstances and conditions have particular educational needs and interests. What, when and how they would like to learn may relate to whether they are younger or older adults, living in a city or the country; employed or unemployed; men or women.*



It would be difficult to describe the conditions, needs and interests of all these groups. In this chapter we have confined ourselves to women and the unemployed.

Besides different groups of adult learners having particular educational needs and interests, there are special areas of interest and concern which link adults together. For example, a common learning interest among adults may be to learn a language, perhaps Irish or another European language. It may be to learn more about their religion with the aim of becoming better Christians. It may be to learn more about themselves and the society in which they live. Again it would be difficult to describe all these different areas of interest. What we have done in the second part of this chapter is to concentrate on four broad areas: Adult Basic Education; Professional and Continuing Education; Daytime Education and Community Education.

### 1. PRIORITY GROUPS

#### WOMEN

Since the early 1980s the most vibrant, dynamic and innovative area of adult education has been women's education. With the provision of morning classes and creche facilities, women began to use adult education to develop confidence, to examine their role in society and to continue their education. As women took more control of their own education, the emphasis shifted from content, to an emphasis on both content and process. This is one of the main reasons why women's education has been so successful. Women began to understand that how they learn was as important as what they learn. Attention to the process has meant a move away from a traditional schoolroom style of learning to one where students and tutor sit in a circle, where the tutor facilitates the students learning by drawing on the students' experiences. where an

open and supportive environment is built up and where a variety of teaching methods are used. This does not mean that the content has suffered. Rather it has meant that both tutor and students have made the knowledge gained their own and it has given them insights about themselves and the society in which they live.

Women have traditionally been the main consumers of adult education. The traditional kind of adult education courses which were offered to them reflected the position and role of women in Irish society as perceived by providers who are mostly men. While the traditional courses on offer, such as cookery, dress-making, arts etc. fulfill an important need, they can nevertheless reinforce the passive and non-critical role of women in society.

In the eighties women began to see adult education as a means towards developing self-confidence, examining their role in society and critically reflecting on the structures in society which prescribe that role. With the development of day-time education women have begun to take control not only of what they want to learn but how they want to learn it. They have recognised the need for flexibility and the importance of their own experiences as women, and have begun to draw on these experiences in the kinds of learning they wish to pursue.

Courses which include, personal development and courses which address social and political issues are beginning to allow women to reflect on and challenge their traditional roles. This is perhaps best described by a woman who has gone through such a process in adult education.

I held the door of the creche open, shoved the pram in, mentioned the kids' names; their nappies and bottles came out quickly and I closed the door, as much to keep them in as to keep me out. It was a real bieve for me. I can see myself

there holding the door saying, "You did it." I was quite fearful about what I had done. I still had this working class thing about the kids being my all and there I was actually separating myself from them.

First of all I went into Basic English. It was something I knew I could cope with. But after a few classes the teacher said to me that I would enjoy the writing class a lot more. So I went into the class and from that moment I was committed to adult learning and development. From day one it changed me. In those classes I heard people saying things that I had been thinking for years, that motherhood wasn't enough, that house cleaning wasn't enough. I wasn't prepared to do that for forty years but how could I dare say that, with a family, bringing up kids and married with no real problems, except a huge sense of dissatisfaction with the job. I loved the kids. If I could only have been with them all day long. I actually taught the kids to read before they went to school. I felt that was my job and the other stuff, the nappies and the cleaning, was a chore. It didn't satisfy me, you could get it over in a couple of hours but I ended up stretching it over the entire day.

In the class I heard people put sentences around my thoughts. I heard the word feminism for the first time, even though in my own way I had been a committed feminist all my life and didn't know it. When I went into this group they were only kind of playing with feminism. But I was home. I had my place and I never looked back. I've been involved with adult learning now for almost five years. Class is the issue we have now. Class is raising its head. For some, adult learning is seen as leisure activity, but for us in KLEAR, we see it as something for working class women, a way of developing. It can enlighten us about our situations, our families and help us to develop skills for a market. We enable women to take greater control of their lives and simply

hearing someone say that this is not the way it should be, gives us freedom.

Cathleen O'Neill (KLEAR)  
from *Dublin Belles* Mairin Johnston (ed), Dublin: Attic Press, 1988.

Women's education is however beset by the same problems that affect much of this kind of adult education provision, namely lack of funding, provision of essential facilities such as premises, creche etc.

### What Needs to be Done?

1. In order to sustain and develop women's education, women should be given greater control of and a greater involvement in their own learning.
2. Adult education courses should be made more accessible to women through the provision of reasonably priced courses, adequate facilities, in particular a creche, and a flexible timetable.
3. Learning should be based on women's real needs and interests including such issues as returning to education and paid work.
4. Learning structures and environments should be developed which allow women to discover their own real needs and interests, and their learning should be based on these.

## THE UNEMPLOYED OR UNWAGED

Since the middle of the 1980s the level of unemployment in Ireland has begun to stabilise around a quarter of a million or 18% of the workforce. There has been a gradual rise in the proportion of unemployed people who are long term unemployed, i.e. who have been out of employment for more than one year. Education and training are central to helping unemployed or unwaged people improve their opportunities in life. Education can be a great help in maintaining and developing self-confidence and morale, and preventing despair and alienation.

FÁS has introduced a number of schemes including Returning to Work, Building on Experience, and Jobsearch. There have been job placement schemes run by the Department of Labour, including Teamwork and the Social Employment Scheme. Besides these Government Schemes, there have been initiatives taken by a number of community and voluntary associations as well as by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions who have set up a number of unemployment centres throughout the country.

In the specific sphere of education for unemployed people there have been many achievements. In 1986, the Educational Opportunities Scheme began to operate in Tallaght, Dublin and Limerick city. One of the main aims of the project was to allow longterm unemployed people to study for the Leaving Certificate while they would still be allowed to collect their social welfare benefits or allowances. The pilot project operated successfully for three years and is being extended to other parts of the country. One of the limitations revealed in the pilot project areas is the small numbers who participate – for example, 47 in Tallaght which is less than one per cent of the total number unemployed in the area. This may be related to the inappropriateness of starting off with Leaving Certificate subjects as well as to the hidden costs involved in returning to study, including travel, books and other materials.

There are two specific problems affecting the participation of unemployed or unwaged people in adult education courses. The first is the widespread belief among unemployed people that participation in an adult education course means disqualification from benefit or assistance, because it means that during the time that people are studying they are not strictly available for and seeking employment. Technically this is still the case, although a Deciding Officer within the Department of Social Welfare can, when approached, give authorisation. The problem is that the deciding officer is in effect rarely approached. This is because there has been no publicity campaign to say that it is possible for unemployed people to attend adult education courses and not have monies deducted from their welfare benefits or allowances.

The second problem is that with the exception of some Leaving Certificate courses, the cost of taking an adult education course from the point of view of the unemployed or unwaged is prohibitively expensive. For the majority of them it is difficult if not impossible to find the £15/£30 necessary to pay for the average ten week course.

### **AN INVESTMENT IN PEOPLE**

I have been out of work for over three years, and like most of the unemployed, I have applied for every type of work that was on offer. When you look at most of the application forms that you have to fill up when you are applying for a job, you will see that more than half the application form is taken up with space for your educational qualifications. I often thought - "If I had that much education, then I would be doing the interviews instead of only applying." But like the changing patterns in the work place, qualifications for work have also changed, and it was this that set me thinking about returning to full-time education.

*An Investment in People. Noel McCormack. Adult Learner*

### **What Needs to be Done?**

1. The Social Welfare Act should be changed to allow those who are unemployed, particularly the longterm unemployed, to participate in educational courses without their unemployment benefit or assistance being affected.
2. The self-financing rule as it relates to unemployed and unwaged people participating in adult education courses should be abolished.
3. Community based learning programmes which respond to the specific educational needs and interests of unemployed people should be planned and implemented with their cooperation.

### **OTHER GROUPS**

We have focussed on women and the unemployed as examples of the special educational needs of particular groups within Irish society. There are other groups which also have special needs. The lack of participation in adult education courses among men, particularly unemployed men, indicates the need for innovative approaches to increasing their participation. Older people are another neglected group. There are little or no specific educational programmes for the elderly in Ireland. Crafts, exercises and Christmas parties are not sufficient responses to the learning needs of the elderly. People who are living in isolated rural areas have educational needs which are often quite different from those living in decayed or run down inner city areas. People who belong to racial and ethnic minorities will often want to learn about the relationship between themselves and the settled community. People who are disabled in any way may have particular learning needs. There are many other groups of learners who have special educational needs and interests. We have only drawn attention to some of these.

## 2. SPECIAL AREAS OF ADULT EDUCATION

### ADULT BASIC EDUCATION

Adult Basic Education includes a range of activities pursued by adults who have had little chance to avail of educational opportunities while in school. Emphasis is on improving the basic skills of literacy and numeracy. Adult basic education also responds to personal development and post literacy needs, which include the basic skills for participating in society. This kind of education is generally sought by people who, for a variety of reasons, have left school early, who have never been at school or whose needs have not been met within the school system. Many have been deprived of the right to read and write and have missed out on all sorts of other educational and social opportunities. Adult Basic Education provides an opportunity for people who wish to recommence their education and provides a link to a broader range of educational activities.

#### Who Provides Adult Basic Education?

The main source of provision is through literacy schemes which rely to a large extent on the commitment of local volunteers. Literacy schemes provide a range of learning opportunities centred around reading and writing skills with very little development in the area of numeracy. These are organised on an individual and group basis, but many rural projects rely almost exclusively on individual tuition.

Many VECs offer Basic English and Maths classes which are organised in the same way as evening classes. Fees are usually charged at a lower rate than other adult education courses and sometimes there is no fee at all. The Dublin Institute of Adult Education and the People's College also offer literacy, Basic English and Maths courses as well as a broader range of second chance educational activities.

Literacy, numeracy and social skills courses are offered by FÁS programmes, rehabilitation centres, traveller's workshops, prisons and youth projects as part of a broader programme of education and training. Community groups, churches, centres for the unemployed and some psychiatric hospitals offer literacy courses. Courses in home management, budgeting, parenting and personal development offered by charitable organisations such as St. Vincent de Paul also come within the ambit of adult basic education.

The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA), while not a provider, acts as a forum for anyone involved in literacy and basic education as well as a resource centre for materials and ideas. It arranges seminars, training courses, writing week-ends and provides much informal and practical support for Basic Education projects. It also acts as a referral point for people who need information and guidance.

#### A DREAM COME TRUE

I am a Soldier in the Irish Army and for the past 15 years I have been a Three Star Private. In that time I have been recommended for many a Corporal course, but would not go on a course because of my spelling problem. I have acted Corporal on many an occasion with the U.N. Overseas and at home with my own unit. The Officers and Sergeants over me could not understand why, as I did the Corporal job so well, that I did not do the course.

So I decided to do something about my spelling. I found out where I could go back to school. The day I walked through the big red door as it was then, of number 3 Mountjoy Square, I thought to myself how would I be received. Would they say I was too old or that they had no time for me. The first two people I met were Rose and Berni. They made me feel at ease. They listened and understood my problem. As I left the office I felt good at last, there was a chance for me.

Then I met Pauline who was to be my tutor for the next number of years. As time went by Pauline brought me a long way in the world of words with her understanding and patience. I don't know how her patience held out but she got me over my problem.

I went on a Corporal course in September 1988. The course was for 16 weeks and it was all class room work with 18 written exams, each exam was 3 hours long and I passed them all. I finished my course on the 15th December 1988, and I am now a Military Police Corporal. I can never thank Pauline enough for all her help, understanding and patience. For Pauline made my dream come true for me.

Brendan. *Printout*. No. 9. Magazine of Dublin Literacy Scheme.

### How is Adult Basic Education Funded?

Adult basic education is a life-line for many groups, providing the only means towards self development, basic skills acquisition, employability and confidence in their own abilities. It has been consistently underfunded over the years.

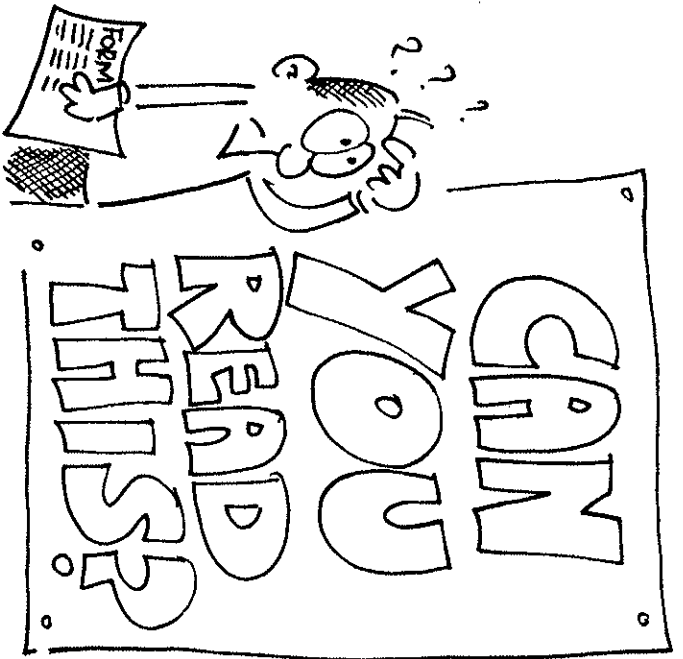
Literacy provision which began to develop in the early seventies was initially provided entirely by volunteers. It is still largely dependent on voluntary effort even though in the past ten years there has been an increase in support for local literacy schemes by VECs. This support has generally been in terms of accommodation and administrative facilities. With the advent of the Adult Literacy and Community Education Budget in 1985, Adult Education Boards began to allocate part of this funding to the development of literacy work. In 1989, the budget allocation for Adult Literacy and Community Education was £500,000.

Other sources of funding include grants-in-aid to specific organisations such as the Dublin Institute of Adult Education, The People's College and NALA. The Dublin Literacy Scheme is funded by the City of Dublin VEC. This scheme is unique in that its funding is considerably greater than other schemes, enabling it to employ two full-time workers and a number of part-time tutors.

Another method of funding for Adult Basic Education is the allocation of discretionary teaching hours. This is where VECs are given an allocation of teaching hours sanctioned by the Department of Education to provide support for travellers workshops, community training workshops, prisons and adult literacy schemes.

Basic English and Maths courses, as well as other personal development courses organised by the VECs and other providers are usually fee paying. These fees are often kept to a minimum to ensure access for people who most need them. These courses are subsidised by the surplus accruing from the general run of adult education courses offered, so to a large extent they are subject to the fluctuation in numbers enrolling for leisure or career oriented courses.

Other sources of support for adult basic education projects include the Social Employment Scheme and charitable funding. Some groups embark on their own fundraising campaigns.



### **Where Does Adult Basic Education Take Place?**

Over half of existing literacy schemes use a room based in a school. Others use private homes, local community buildings and, where they exist, adult education centres. Some schemes have no longterm access to premises. Most are subject to the school opening times which means that for the summer period virtually no provision is available.

### **When Does it Take Place?**

The majority of Adult Basic Education courses are run in the evening time, usually one evening per week with vacation breaks corresponding to the school vacation. Some efforts have been made to organise daytime courses, but they are hampered by the accessibility of premises, lack of creche facilities and the fact that unemployed people are technically unavailable for work while

attending classes, although room for manoeuvre has increased here. Apart from the community training workshops, prison and travellers workshops, no provider is in a position to offer fulltime courses. Occasionally groups such as NALA, Vincent de Paul and Church organisations offer residential weekend courses and seminars.

### **Who Teaches Basic Adult Education Courses?**

Tuition in Adult Basic Education courses is dependent on a large number of volunteer tutors most of whom work in mainstream literacy projects. In 1987 a NALA survey reported that 1255 tutors, were involved in literacy tuition 82% of whom were women. This reflects the fact that literacy work is either voluntary or of low pay and status. The number of paid tutors in literacy schemes is no more than one hundred.

### **What Training Opportunities are Available?**

Most literacy schemes provide initial and on-going training courses for their volunteers although the length and quality of such courses vary depending on the resources available to the particular scheme. Many schemes are dependent on local remedial teachers for their training programmes, or on a visiting organiser from a neighbouring scheme. A substantial number of tutors working in workshop settings have no training. Basic English and Maths teachers generally do not have training in adult education.

### **What Needs to be Done?**

1. There is a need for an increased awareness of the complex nature of illiteracy as both a personal and social problem.
2. The Kenny Report "Lifelong Learning" recommended that courses for adults in basic education - literacy, numeracy and coping skills - should be provided free of charge and that the Government should accept that fees for certain other disadvantaged groups need to be waived in whole or part. This recommendation should be implemented.
3. Access to adult basic education involves the need for easy entry, provision without fees and opportunities available locally.
4. Adults entering basic education should be provided with a variety of learning opportunities suited to their individual needs.
5. Basic education organisers should be paid since dependency on voluntary organisers inhibits continuity and development of basic education services.
6. Imaginative publicity methods should be used not only to recruit students both locally and nationally but also to inform decision makers and the general public about the essential nature of adult basic education.

### **FURTHER AND CONTINUING EDUCATION**

Further and continuing education is that form of adult education which people most often engage in as part of their work or occupation. It usually involves upgrading or updating the knowledge and skills which they have received during their initial specialised education for example as a teacher, nurse, accountant, etc. It is often associated with the issue of paid educational leave.

#### **Who Provides the Courses?**

Further and continuing education courses are offered by the third level colleges, by employers, by professional associations, or more recently, through some form of open learning or distance education. Examples are courses offered by the Irish Management Institute and FAS through its Distance Learning Package for Trainers. Distance Learning is particularly suited to professional forms of continuing education since participants are more likely to have the initial level of education, the self-confidence, skills and competencies appropriate to such education as well as the finance for the learning packs, fees and technical equipment necessary. Of course, much of professional continuing education takes place through the more informal, but nevertheless systematic, learning associated with seminars and conferences.

#### **What is Paid Educational Leave?**

Paid educational leave is where employees are subsidised either by the employer, the Government or some other organisation, e.g. a trade union, to engage in some form of education or training related to their work. In most circumstances it is associated with bringing people up to date with new developments in their field of work.

Paid educational leave is generally seen as continuous leave over a lengthy period of time, e.g. a few hours each week during which employees engage in a course which may lead to a certificate, diploma or degree. It is also associated with intensive week-long or weekend residential courses. In recent years, there has been a switch away from paid educational leave towards open learning and distance education using videos, tapes and computers. Many modern companies involve their employees in some form of further and continuing education, e.g. learning how to use computers, new forms of stock control, etc and this is often done in the workplace.

### Who Benefits?

The individual, the company and society in general all benefit from further and continuing education. The more individuals engage in further and continuing education, the more employable they will be. The more a company encourages and provides incentives for workers to engage in further and continuing education, the more competitive they will remain. Further and continuing education adds to and maintains the existing education and skill base of our country and thereby maintains its competitiveness vis à vis other countries.

### What is Missing?

By and large, further and continuing education courses are provided on an *ad hoc* piecemeal basis throughout the country. There is no national body to promote this area of adult education. There is a need for such a body to develop policies (particularly in relation to paid educational leave), to encourage public and private companies to provide their employees with access to further and continuing education, to co-ordinate provision and to develop appropriate curricula and standards. There is no advice or counselling service available regarding which courses are most suitable and there is little or no formal recognition in terms of nationally

### What Needs to be Done?

1. Third level colleges and universities are caught up in traditional academic approaches and are not sufficiently flexible and market orientated to cater for further and continuing education courses. There is a need to move towards the provision of an accredited system of learning based on modular courses in which further and continuing education is potentially certifiable. Such a system is being promoted by the NCEA for its affiliated colleges, but needs to be extended to other educational providers.
2. There is a need for a Government policy on the issue of further and continuing education, promoting involvement and providing incentives for individuals and public and private companies to participate. In particular, there is need for legislation on paid educational leave which would develop and protect workers' rights to participate in further and continuing education courses.
3. In this area courses need to be more flexible and oriented towards the specific learning needs and interests of the participants.
4. Free, or at least heavily subsidised, further and continuing education courses should be made available to the unemployed and unwaged who have most to benefit from participation.

## DAY-TIME EDUCATION

Day-time adult education includes any education in which adults participate during daytime hours, e.g. in-service training, third level degree courses, distance education, etc. However, daytime adult education has come to be understood as the relatively recent phenomenon of adults, mostly women, attending a variety of courses ranging from personal development to second chance education in their local areas during day-time hours.

I heard it on the radio on the "Women's Programme". I think she said it was classes for women, for women at home. There would be a creche available. Those are the words I heard "creche". I had a baby, I couldn't have gone without a creche.

As far as night-time is concerned I am always far too tired to be interested in these classes. I just couldn't take in anything at night. Housework keeps your hands occupied all the time but not your mind. The morning and evening classes offer things that are education; crafts are an antidote.

AONTAS, *Live and Learn*, 1988, p.38

There has been a rapid growth in this area of adult education in recent years, particularly in suburban areas. In many ways it could be seen as one of the most dynamic areas of adult education and its growth and popularity changes the image of adult education as solely a night-time activity. Just as we can point to the way this group of students and tutors have organised themselves into an action group such as IDEA (Improvement of Daytime Education for Adults) we can also emphasise the fragility of day-time education for adults in general.

Perhaps one of the most interesting features of day-time adult education is the extent to which participants take control of their

own learning. In many areas they have formed 'management' groups who decide what courses are needed. They have an input into how these should be taught and who should be recruited as tutors. They also play a major role in publicising courses, in setting up and running creches and in offering informal educational counselling.

### Who Participates in Day-time Education?

To date, the participants have been mainly women who work full-time in the home and who see day-time courses as an opportunity to 'broaden their horizons', break the isolation of being home-bound. For some it is an opportunity to enable them help their children with schoolwork.

### What Kinds of Courses Are There on Offer?

Courses range from literacy and basic education to creative writing, personal development, social studies and women's studies. They also include second chance education courses which centre around Leaving Certificate subjects. The range of courses offered in day-time education is continually changing in response to the needs and interests of participants. This reflects the dynamic and innovative nature of this area of adult education.

### What Kinds of Problems Face The Development of Daytime Adult Education?

Despite its rapid growth day-time adult education is faced with many problems which are symptomatic of the lack of a national adult education policy and inadequate funding. The majority of day-time courses are held in local schools. There are two problems with this. Firstly, in many cases there is no security of tenure for adult students in schools. In some cases they are treated as intruders and are given no sense of having the right to be there. Secondly, schools may not always be the best settings for adult

education given that adults who had a bad experience of school the first time around are unlikely to be attracted to participate.

The availability of creche facilities where day-time adult courses are offered is essential. At the moment the setting up, running and funding of creches falls on the adult students themselves. Little or no financial assistance is available for this important facility. The result of this is that many women who originally came to attend particular courses spend much of their time and energy in fund raising and other activities related to the creche. Furthermore, there is no statutory responsibility on school principals to provide a suitable room for the setting up of a creche. In some cases, they refuse to have a creche on their premises.

As mentioned earlier the main participants in day-time education are women and many of the exciting developments which have occurred have been initiated by women themselves. This is a positive feature particularly given the lack of opportunities for women in Irish society and most especially for women who work full-time in the home. Increasingly, it is through the type of education involved in many of the day-time courses that women can play a fuller role in their own communities and society at large.

This type of education is also important for other groups such as unemployed men and people who left school early. Day-time adult education faces the problem of attracting the participation of people from such groups.

### **What Needs to be Done?**

1. Greater efforts should be made to involve more people in day-time adult education, particularly those without educational qualifications.
2. Statutory providers of adult education should be mandated to provide accommodation including creches for daytime education.
3. Other issues central to the development of daytime adult education such as fees, tutor training and accreditation should be responded to along the same lines proposed elsewhere in this document.

### **COMMUNITY EDUCATION**

Community education is a planned and organised attempt to help people develop the attitudes, skills and knowledge they need in order to solve the problems of their community. In this process people define their own needs and problems, place a high value on using the resources available in the community and democratically involve themselves in the solutions. This vibrant sector of adult education takes particular account of the learning needs of the less educated, less articulate, less confident, and less powerful members of the community. A central feature of community education is the process of empowering people to take control of their own lives and participate fully in the community in which they live.

Many people in the field of adult education are critical of the low level of funding for community education and the generally unplanned way in which this area in particular has developed. But it is also important to realise that students, even those who agree

with this criticism, will see community education as the most important educational experience of their lives. For most it is the first time they are able to learn what they like, in whatever way they want, and with a teacher who values each individual's contribution. Life experience is valued. Participation is active, informality encouraged and learning enjoyable.

### Who Provides Community Education?

Unfortunately, much of what constitutes existing community education type provision centres around home management or domestic economy type courses. This is a reflection of the thinking behind the allocation of the Adult Literacy and Community Education budget in 1985. When setting up the *ad hoc* Adult Education Boards in reference to community education it was stated:

*These courses will reflect the needs of the local community in particular those in disadvantaged areas and will include subjects such as child management and home making; courses will also be designed to help community groups who are trying to deal with drug problems in an educational framework.*

One of the main providers of community education is the network of Adult Education Boards who provide community education programmes through the Adult Education Organisers.

Even though each AEO gives community education a local flavour there are examples of the kinds of activities that are organised which we could call typical. Many community education programmes are provided in a house on a council estate rented from the local authority. This house forms the base from which a range of services are available to people in the area, e.g. creche, play school, meeting place, etc. The AEO, in consultation with the committee responsible for the house, provides courses such as English literature, mathematics, personal development, child psychology and health related topics. The residents see these courses

as an important part of their own development and as making a significant difference to the quality of life in the community. Students pay either a nominal charge or none at all. Most tutors are paid in accordance with the VEC part-time teacher rates.

In recent years FÁS has initiated a Community Enterprise Programme nationwide. This specific aspect of community education aims to provide community groups with the knowledge and skills they need to set up and develop their own business enterprise. Though it is too early to judge the success of the programme it may well be that it makes a more modest contribution to enterprise and job creation than to the broader area of community development.

It should be pointed out that a great deal of community education has to do with teaching people how to adapt to their present situation. This model of community education contrasts with the model offered at the top of this section and with the model described in Chapter 3.

Church groups, particularly in the poorer areas of the larger towns, are providing some of the more exciting programmes in community education. These usually have a sharper focus on social change. They attempt to engage local people in an exploration of their present reality with the intention of identifying the social, political and economic roots of their problems and developing the skills necessary to alter their situation. The Dublin Institute of Adult Education and the Catholic Social Service Conference are typical providers of this form of community education.

The Department of Labour funded Social Employment Scheme is used by the Irish Congress of Trades Unions to fund a number of Centres for Unemployed People. Along with information and advice many of these centres provide an interesting community education programme.

### **Where Does Community Education Take Place?**

It is obvious from this brief picture that community education differs from much of the rest of adult education in that it always takes place in the community. This is important and has the effect of making learning accessible to people who for very good social reasons find it difficult to both travel to more usual adult education venues and pay the necessary fee.

Houses rented from councils, parish halls, community halls, schools, etc. are common venues for community education. Unfortunately, many estates are built without any community centre and this further compounds the disadvantage of the area.

### **How Is Community Education Funded?**

Community education is the kind of service which is essential for the well-being of many people in disadvantaged areas. Some go so far as to say that it is more cost effective in dealing with the consequences of poverty than medication. It frequently lifts depression, increases self-confidence and gives people the experience of seeing their poverty as a shared and social problem.

It is funded in various ways. The VEC programmes are funded from the miniscule Adult Literacy and Community Education budget. The Community Enterprise Programme is funded from the Department of Labour through FÁS. The National Lottery provides the funding for SVP. The churches fund their own programmes usually from public collections.

### **When Does Community Education Take Place?**

The short answer to this question is that it takes place when students want it to take place. It is impossible to organise community education in any other way. Some programmes, especially in the VEC sector, are day-time while many of the Community Enterprise Programmes are held in the evening.

### **Who Teaches Community Education?**

There is little or no research or reliable information available on community education and so it is difficult to generalise. We do not have any profile of teachers in this area but it can be safely said that they are usually women, part-time workers, poorly paid and untrained in community education or adult education in general.

Maynooth offers a graduate diploma in adult and community education and this is the only third level course producing community educators. The FÁS Community Enterprise Programme includes elements of staff development for the facilitators in its programme. However, the vast majority of teachers in community education, as in other sectors of adult education, are untrained and without any ongoing training. This is a symptom of the undeveloped nature of community education and of adult education in general. Very few professions would be satisfied if its services were delivered almost entirely by people untrained in the profession they practise.

## What Needs to be Done?

1. The ultimate aim of community education should focus on enabling people to understand the social, political and economic forces which shape their lives and work towards identifying realistic courses of action to change them.
2. Community facilities, particularly schools, community centres, libraries, etc. should be made available to all members of the community for a wide variety of learning activities.
3. Training opportunities should be made available for people teaching in community education projects.

## OTHER AREAS

In this section of the report we have concentrated on four special areas of adult education which we consider to be of major importance. There are obviously many other areas which could be considered important. The promotion and development of courses for people wishing to learn the Irish language is something for which AONTAS has argued for many years. Learning other European languages has never been strong among Irish adults and will obviously become increasingly important as the notion of an expanded European Community becomes a reality. The rapid growth in a wide variety of social and personal development courses indicates that there is a whole new area of interest in understanding and reflecting critically about oneself and the society in which we are living. The whole question of what it is to be religious in modern society has led to a huge growth in religious education courses. The relation between the richer countries of the Northern hemisphere and the poorer ones of the South in terms of their political oppression and economic underdevelopment has led to a new

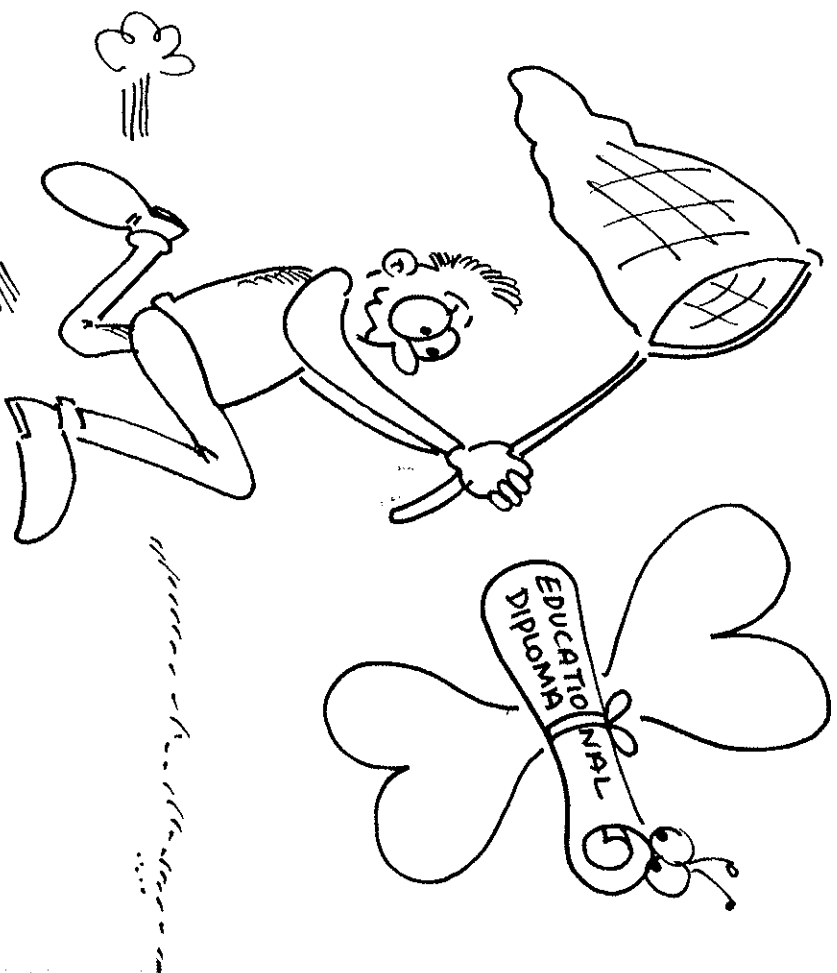
demand for Development Studies. Finally, the question of how humans relate to the environment and how we can reduce the negative impact of our lifestyles upon it has led to an interest in Environmental Studies.

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## 6 Access to adult education

*Access to adult education is not a simple concept. It includes areas such as distance learning, educational broadcasting, accreditation and educational guidance and counselling. It also covers such widely different aspects as self-image, attitudes to education, motivation, finance, creches, etc. Whether a student has access depends on a whole range of these interlinked factors which combine to help or hinder participation.*



The first link in the chain of factors is the student's self-image and self-concept. If these are low it will be difficult to provide access at all. Facilities which may remind students of school days in the distant past will form a formidable barrier to participation. On the other hand, warm ways of relating, non-competitive structures and democratic negotiation of the curriculum will improve self-image and self-concept and ease access.

The attitude to education either of the student or of society (home, community, workplace) is another important factor in having or not having access. If adult education is valued at home, in the community or at work, access will be easier for the student. So an important part of increasing access is the work of building a positive attitude to education in all these areas.

Access will be eased if the goals of the learners are addressed in courses and programmes. Developmental psychology points to the range of tasks which an adult needs to address at different stages of their lives if they are to continue to grow and develop towards maturity. The life-tasks of a young twenty-two year old are obviously different from those of a sixty-two year old coming to the end of active employment. These psychological factors are important and must be surmounted before other barriers to participation can be tackled.

Removing barriers to participation is another factor in easing access. In the absence of creche facilities, finding someone to mind the children can be a major barrier. Very often, unless someone is found to mind children access is impossible. The time at which classes are held can either ease access or provide an insurmountable barrier. Research in Northern Ireland indicates that morning classes are more suitable for unemployed people.

Another barrier is the previously mentioned self-financing rule, especially for low income families, the unemployed and women. Even when second chance education courses have a reduced fee,

they are perceived as very expensive by students with little or no income.

When I heard about the classes, it seemed like the opportunity I had been waiting for. I told no one in case I hadn't the courage to go through with it, in spite of wanting it desperately. Another problem was the £10 fee. It sounds mad now, but five years ago and with five small children £10 was a lot of money. I didn't want to ask my husband for it, in case I chickened out. So I collected my children's allowance and put the money aside. I remember how guilty I felt because that money would normally be spent on shoes for one of the children.

AONTAS, *Live and Learn*, 1988 p. 41.

There are also other difficulties. For example, there are very few purpose built adult education centres. The fact that buildings used for adult education are almost always used for other purposes means that adults have to fit in with the activities of other groups, e.g. only evening classes are possible in some areas. This is a particular problem in council estates and in rural areas. Access to many community facilities, halls, and clubs is frequently limited to members only, despite the fact that in many cases these were built almost entirely by local effort.

There are also a number of factors which ease access. Most important of these is the publicity and information distributed to advertise courses. If this information is designed to address whichever of the above barriers is restricting access then it will be even more effective. The emphasis needs to be placed on how information is received rather than how it is disseminated. For instance, if the adult educator sees that mothers will not attend unless arrangements are made to mind children then the publicity material should address this problem in a practical way.

There is no proper counselling service in Ireland for adults wishing to learn. This frequently acts as a barrier. The AONTAS information service offered in September each year bears this out. Many people are not sure what they should choose to study from a bewildering array of courses on offer. Counselling advice and information services ease access.

Access to third level education is so restricted in Ireland that it is seen by most adults as non-existent. There is a growing need for greater access to existing institutions and their full range of courses. There is also a need to develop a range of modular courses which would lead to degrees and diplomas. The lack of accreditation can deter people from attending courses and is also a way of saying that as far as credit is concerned adult education leads nowhere. The coming of the European Single Market in 1992 may open the possibility of studying distance learning courses from other countries for internationally recognised credits and degrees.

#### **What Needs to be Done?**

1. The self-financing rule should be redefined to ensure that unemployed, unwaged and other disadvantaged groups are not prevented from participating in adult education because of the cost of courses.
2. Adult education should be given a brighter, more attractive image and those who have not benefited from their initial education should be encouraged to participate.
3. All educational, community and other public buildings should be made easily accessible to adult learners.
4. At present, only 1.4% of third level students are over 25 years old. This proportion should be increased to a least 5% by the end of the century.

## DISTANCE LEARNING

Distance learning is the linking of teachers with learners via various media when the teacher and learners are at a distance from each other. Distance learning is not a new phenomenon and has been around since papyrus was used for writing letters. Maps, smoke signals, travelling teachers, papal letters, proclamations of kings, etc. are all well-known methods of distance learning. What is new is the way a number of well known activities have been put together into one category. We now see correspondence schools, radio and television education programmes, computer based learning etc. as distance learning.

Distance learning may involve students studying a particular course coming together perhaps once a week to meet with a tutor. It is often associated with people studying for a degree, certificate or diploma.

Open Learning is a particular form of distance learning which has been developed in recent years. Its emphasis is on students learning about specific subjects or areas of interest at their own time, place and pace. It uses educational packs which may contain reading materials as well as audio-tapes, videos, computer-disks, etc. It has generally been aimed at commercial organisations and their employees who wish to enhance their knowledge, skills and expertise in specific areas such as stock-taking, consumer relations, security, etc.

### Who Provides It?

Distance learning is provided by a number of agencies both in Ireland and outside.

Dublin City University provides degree level studies in Information Technology and Limerick University has a degree in Management Studies. The Institute of Public Administration also offers a degree course in Public Administration.

The National Distance Education Council and the National Distance Education Centre based at Dublin City University have plans to bring about single subject certification in a variety of scientific and liberal arts courses through distance learning in the near future. The National Council for Educational Awards (NCEA) has recommended that distance learning be promoted and encouraged as a way of significantly extending educational opportunity. It sees the possibility of making all the courses presently validated by the NCEA available by distance learning.

For a number of years the Open University has been providing access to both their degree level courses and community education packs to residents in Ireland. At the moment, however, only prisoners and prison staff have access to the full range of options necessary to complete a degree. Foundation courses are not available to residents of the Republic and, consequently, even if higher level courses are taken, the student is not able to complete all the necessary course work for a degree.

The Open College, also British based, has in the last year been offering study packages in more technical subjects. A number of these study packs are suitable for individual study. Open learning packs are now available in a wide range of subjects from learning languages to car-maintenance.

### What Needs to be Done?

1. Distance learning approaches should be developed by all educational institutions in Ireland so as to extend educational opportunities as widely as possible, particularly to those living in isolated areas.

2. The National Distance Education Council, the National Council for Educational Awards and the British Open University should collaborate to ensure that

University courses, especially in those subjects for which there has been a traditionally high demand, i.e., arts and social studies, are made available to adult learners in Ireland as soon as possible.

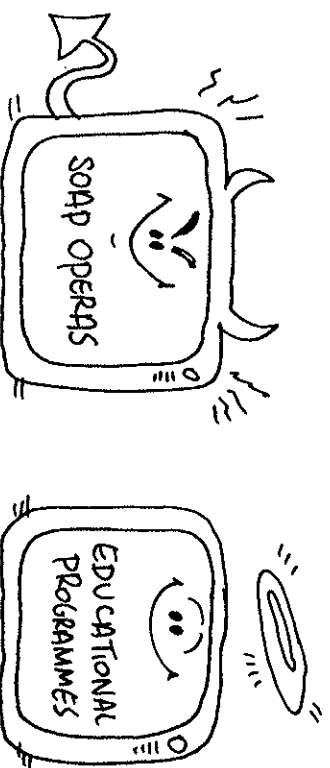
3. Distance learning often involves new forms of information technology which can be costly. Precautions should be taken to ensure that distance learning is made accessible not just to those who can afford the cost of courses, but also to those who have most to benefit from participation, especially people who lack basic education and skills.

4. All programmes offered through distance education should be on a modular basis thereby allowing adults to study at their own pace and over time accumulate the credits necessary for a degree or diploma.

## EDUCATIONAL BROADCASTING

RTE is obliged by law to provide educational programmes and the majority of these are directed towards adults, e.g. gardening, farming, foreign language programmes, Thomas Davis lectures and development education programmes. In the past, RTE also broadcast a limited number of programmes produced by the Department of Education, e.g. Telefís Scoile, some of which appealed to adults. More recently, RTE has expanded its educational brief to include a wide variety of programmes on topical issues such as unemployment, literacy, money management, the environment and women's education. Multi-channel television has also provided access to programmes produced by the Open University. There have been many interesting experiments in the area of educational radio broadcasting. Programmes such as "Monday at Nine", "Dialogue" and "Addendum" indicate the thin line that divides educational broadcasting from ordinary but good radio and television.

The Radio and Television Act (1988) provided a missed opportunity to ensure the provision of a wide range of new and innovative programmes in adult education. There is no reference in the Act to the necessity for those granted licences to provide educational programmes.



The Educational Broadcasting Committee (1982) noted that "the potential of the broadcasting media for the education of adults had not been sufficiently exploited."

### What Needs to be Done?

1. Greater use should be made of television for the broadcasting of educational programmes during the day. Such programmes would be of tremendous benefit to members of disadvantaged groups who are at home during the day and who would like to improve their life opportunities through education. It would be necessary, however, that these programmes would be designed to meet the specific needs and interests of such groups.

2. In the absence of a fully developed educational television service, the Broadcasting Commission should ensure that a wide range of educational programmes are provided by those granted radio licences.

3. If people are to be encouraged to use their spare-time constructively, to reduce their diet of muszack and newszack, then there is a need for the production of attractive, innovative radio and television programmes which expands the present limited understanding of what can constitute educational programmes.
4. Television and radio should be used in off-peak hours to broadcast distance learning educational programmes which enable viewers to obtain degrees, diplomas and certificates.
5. An Educational Broadcasting Centre should be established by the Government to gather suitable educational material from other countries, to develop courses of programmes suited to the educational needs and interests of modern Irish adults, and to disseminate them to the various radio and television stations.

## ACCREDITATION

For some people the reward for participating in education courses is the challenge, enjoyment or particular skill or knowledge which they gain from them. However, others would wish their effort and time to be more formally recognised. This desire for accreditation may be for purely personal satisfaction, but increasingly it is linked to the desire to acquire qualifications which help in gaining employment or in being accepted into third-level education courses.

The issue of accreditation pertains to all levels of adult education. Formal recognition of achievements are a crucial aspect of adult basic education. There is a growing dissatisfaction amongst many participants who having taken a whole range of short courses, e.g. history, english, personal development, social studies, women's studies, etc. and end up wondering where it is all leading. Even courses which award 'diplomas' such as the Extra-Mural courses

run by universities have no official recognition.

If you could do it in a kind of piecemeal way. But to have to take on this enormous commitment because I know what it is like. My daughter went to Trinity and I know the amount of work she had to do. It would not be possible to do your housework as well as doing all that studying. If you could do it over six years instead of over four.

AONTAS, *Live and Learn*, p. 63

The NCEA has recently announced a new scheme ACCS (Accumulation of Credits and Certification of Subjects). This will allow all educational institutions affiliated to the Council to offer students who participate in a course a nationally recognised certificate for each course or part of a programme which they complete. Single subject certification will be a tremendous boost to adult education. Combined with the ability to transfer from one institution to another, it will mean that the individual student will in the future be in a better position to decide on the content of his or her own degree or diploma.

The only problem is that NCEA affiliated colleges are not strong in the provision of arts and social studies courses. These courses have traditionally been the ones which have attracted most interest from adult learners.

### What Needs to be Done?

1. In relation to second chance education, a range of curricula should be devised which are appropriate for adult learners and which would provide an alternative to the Leaving Certificate.
2. Irish universities should follow the example of the NCEA and introduce a system of single subject certification for all their degree and diploma courses.
3. There should also be foundation courses which facilitate the access of adults to third-level education.
4. Where third level institutions become involved in 'outreach' programmes such as U.C.D. in Killester, Dublin and St. Patrick's College, Maynooth through its extra-mural courses, these programmes should be properly accredited.

## EDUCATIONAL GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING

Adults who decide to avail of educational opportunities for whatever reason are at present faced with a bewildering range of courses and institutions which provide them. People choose adult education for a variety of reasons, e.g., personal, social and vocational, but they are often unsure of what courses will be suited to their particular needs. Indeed they may not be completely clear about what they are seeking. The adult student generally chooses a course from a syllabus or guide which has little information or explanation about the structure and content of the course. Enrolment in courses generally involves paying fees and little else. Furthermore, it is often difficult to discover who is organising and teaching the courses. There is little advice available for potential

students about what particular value courses on offer will have, especially for students who want to pursue accredited courses. The Murphy Report (1973 p.75) and the Kenny Commission (1984 pp. 149/150) both emphasised the importance of an educational guidance service for adults in this country. While an internationally recognised service has been available for some time in Northern Ireland, there is no full-time professional service available in the Republic. Adult students need to know what returning to study involves; what level of competence and ability is required for courses; whether courses are accredited; and whether particular courses will meet *their* needs and interests.

### What Needs to be Done?

1. Educational Guidance and Counselling needs to be recognised as a fundamental and integral part of adult education.
2. A guidance and counselling service is needed to provide advice and information to adults who wish to complete or start basic education, engage in further and continuing education, gain qualifications by following accredited courses or pursue courses for their own personal development.
3. An educational guidance and counselling service should have the role of providing an information service. Such a service should have up-to-date information on a wide range of adult education, further training and career opportunities. It should provide information by personal interview, telephone and correspondence. It should include a computer data base which would have the widest possible information on courses, providers, teachers, etc. in adult education.
4. An educational guidance and counselling service should offer an opportunity to identify each person's aspirations, objectives and goals, an assessment of educational

standards where requested, an aptitude test to determine individual abilities, again where requested, discussion of training and educational opportunities at home and abroad, and referral to appropriate provision or support services where necessary.

5. In order to be professional and effective, an educational guidance and counselling service should be staffed by people trained in adult counselling and familiar with the learning needs of adults. Much of the work of such a service would be to give clients accurate information and let them proceed on their own initiative. However, many people seeking information may need support and encouragement or an opportunity to discuss difficulties. Staff therefore need to be able to identify difficulties or unforeseen problems. They need to be familiar with the agencies which deal with special needs, e.g. physical or mental handicap, psychiatric problems, personal problems arising from life crises, and to advise clients about the options open to them. Special testing of individual abilities and aptitudes, where requested, needs to be carried out by trained personnel.

6. Everyone involved in the provision of adult education courses should have professional competence in dealing with the day-to-day needs of adult students. A national educational guidance and counselling service should have as an added responsibility a training role in relation to providers.

#### Further reading

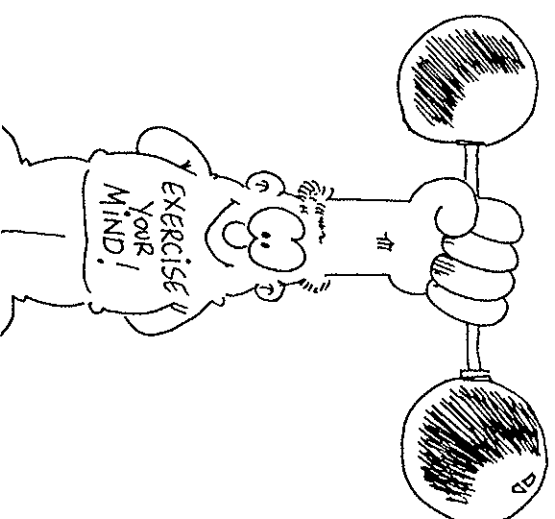
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## 7 The Development of Adult Education

### WHO IS RESPONSIBLE?

*Ultimately the government, but all providers and organisers of adult education are in their own way responsible for the development of adult education. Because of its lack of funding and its perception by the general public as being a hobby or leisure activity, adult education has never been taken seriously enough to promote or implement a structure for its development. It has tended to be a reactive form of education responding to needs in an intermittent way and remaining subject to the fluctuations of the market place.*



The need for courses to be self-financing has meant that adult education has been a largely middle class pursuit, reflecting the interests of the more articulate and the better off.

On the other hand its lack of formal structure has allowed it the flexibility to adapt to a variety of needs. In recent years it has become an important source of education for people who have missed opportunities, or indeed have been victims of the school system. Developments in day-time education, basic education and alternative methods of teaching and facilitation have shown that adult education has the potential and flexibility to become an initiative taker, a pioneering form of education offering opportunities to respond to new areas of interest in a way that other sectors of education cannot.

### **What do Adults Want to Learn?**

What adults want or need to learn is influenced by the society in which they live and the way it responds to change. Factors which affect such change include demographic, economic and technological development as well as access to information. These in turn influence work and leisure activities, family life, social relationships and, consequently, the choices adults make about what they want to learn. As part of this change, adult education has become involved in the process of critically reflecting about the community and society in which we live.

In present day Ireland, there is an emphasis on the acquisition of material wealth and its concomitant value system which rewards individual achievement and lauds competition as opposed to co-operation. Such a system favours survival of the fittest. Social objectives are achieved at the expense of others as evidenced by the fact that one-third of the population is living on or below the poverty line, that close to 250,000 people are unemployed and that many of our young people have had to emigrate. Adult edu-

cation can provide a means whereby the existing economic and social structure can be brought into perspective and basic questions asked about possible alternatives.

Demographic changes will mean a gradual transformation from a predominantly young population to a large older population. This will have implications for the development of adult education which will include creative ways of using the skills and experience of older people.

Swift advances in technological development has meant very radical changes in job and career patterns especially for those who are unskilled or whose skills are not easily transferable. People are likely to change job or career several times during their working lives thus necessitating re-training and more specific educational opportunities. Job sharing, early retirement and voluntary redundancy will also mean that people have more time in which to follow a whole variety of educational pursuits.

Changes in society have also brought about radical changes in traditional family structures. More women are continuing with their careers while rearing children. Women themselves have become more aware of their own value as persons and of the contributions they can make to society if they are given the chance to improve confidence and skills. This has brought about a demand in recent years for day-time education which has been mainly taken up by women.

The influence of the media in our culture figures very prominently with most households having access to television, radio and increasingly, video and computer technology. Multi-channel access has increased the volume and variety of imported visual material some of it unfit for human consumption. To become a discriminating viewer in the face of this barrage of material requires a high level of critical consciousness. On the other hand, the development of the media has broadened people's horizons and provid-

ed opportunities for them to become aware of the global issues affecting their lives.

The growing awareness of global issues has highlighted the need for development education which aims to develop a critical awareness of local national and international issues based on an understanding of world economic and political processes. There is a growing need to become aware of the interdependent nature of our world. This interdependence manifests itself in trading patterns, in environmental issues, in world security, in our shared humanity and in political fora e.g. EC and UN. Development Education is concerned with underdevelopment and questions why, in a world which produces enough food to feed everyone, 730 million people are undernourished and why the northern hemisphere which contains 25% of the world's population controls 75% of its wealth.

### **Responding to New Areas of Interest**

Some providers, organisers and teachers have attempted to respond to emerging areas of interest in adult education. They have attempted to anticipate and meet the demand for social and personal development type courses. Some have concentrated on providing courses in which adult education is seen as a process whereby mature people are facilitated to learn rather than be taught.

The pattern of development of new areas of interest in adult education has generally been sporadic and unplanned. What usually happens is that small groups of people interested in particular issues get together, discuss them, investigate the educational organisations which might provide support and funding and then approach them with a view to providing relevant courses.

An example of such a development has been Day-time Adult Education. This has mostly involved women who want to pursue a

variety of courses ranging from personal development to Leaving Certificate subjects. An educational organisation such as a VEC might extend support in terms of premises and some funding, but much of the organisational work including the structure and content of the courses is carried out by the women themselves. If the group is strong and well-organised it is likely to grow and develop. Such patterns of development abound in adult education.

These developments are significant but at the end of the day they are few and far between. The vast majority of adult education courses are merely replicas of school or college courses in which mature adults are taught what is often considered to be a hobby or leisure type activity. Many adult educators have only been trained to teach children and most adult education courses take place in a classroom used by children. It is no wonder, then, that many Irish people think of adult education simply in terms of going back to school.

### **What Needs to be Done?**

1. There cannot be any real development of adult education in Ireland until the Government acts upon its responsibility to ensure a proper lifelong system of education for all. It cannot fulfil this obligation until it takes statutory responsibility for the provision and development of an adequate system of adult education and provides the necessary funds to do so.

2. There have been two Government Commissions in the 1970s and 80s which investigated the role of adult education in Irish society and made explicit recommendations as to how it could be best developed. The development of adult education depends not so much on any further commissions or deliberation, but on adequate funding. Unless there is such funding adult education will remain out of date and out of place in a modern European oriented Irish society.

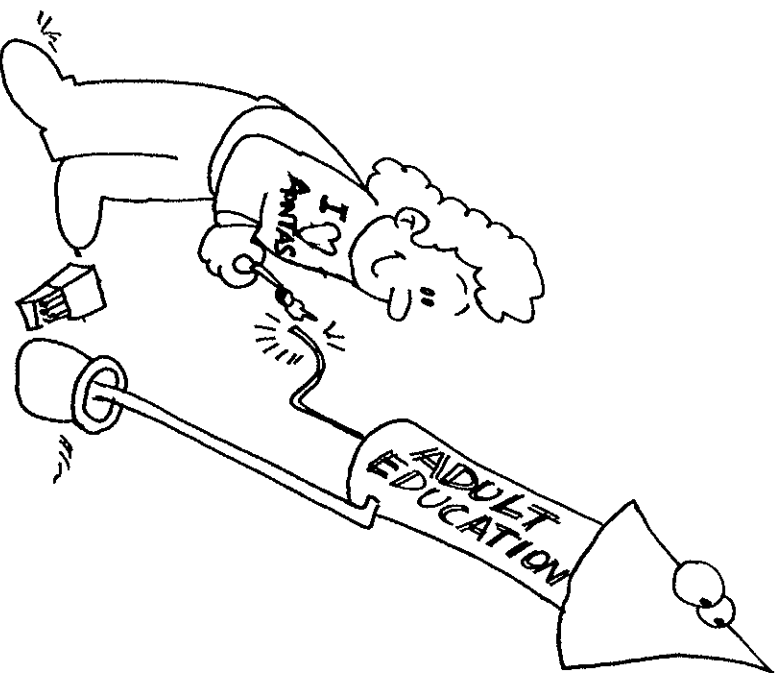
3. AONTAS, NALA, and the IVEA and some of the university departments are actively engaged in the development of adult education. However, the development of good policies and teaching practices requires funds for carrying out the necessary research, as well as planning, developing and initiating pilot programmes. Unless these organisations have sufficient funds for curriculum development, training, and the creation of innovative programmes, adult education in Ireland will only continue to stagger along if not actually stagnate.
4. For an emerging area of interest to grow and for its growth to be sustained, it is necessary to plan for its development. This would include discussions of issues with various interest groups resulting in the initiation of pilot projects and courses, identification of people with skills and expertise and evaluation of any projects undertaken. AONTAS would like to see itself as a forum for new ideas and areas of interest in adult education provision. The continual development of new courses would lead to a demand for a more relevant system of adult education which would help people to reflect on the issues which affect their lives. For example, a course in environmental studies should lead to the raising of serious questions about how society manages its environmental affairs. Teaching materials and methods which are stimulating and lead to questioning and discussion must be part and parcel of such education.
5. Developing new courses and responding to new areas of interest also implies researching needs and making available personnel and facilities for their development. This will inevitably require clear policy planning and commitment on the part of providers and the Department of Education with realistic funding to ensure its growth.

### **Maintaining Contacts: AONTAS, The National Association of Adult Education**

As the National Association of Adult Education, one of the main functions of AONTAS is to provide a forum where all those involved in adult education can come together to discuss matters of mutual interest. This is important as there are hundreds of different providers of adult education courses and tens of thousands of participants who often operate in isolation from each other in their own local communities.

AONTAS is not a provider of adult education courses itself. Its task is to promote and develop adult education in Ireland. It succeeds in bringing together both statutory and voluntary providers of adult education courses throughout the country so that they can act in a united way to improve standards and meet the educational needs of the largest segment of the Irish population. AONTAS is the collective voice of adult education in Ireland.

One of the main aims of AONTAS is to act as a catalyst for adult education development. The work of AONTAS centres on developing networks of adult learners and providers by initiating pilot programmes, producing research reports and policy documents, publishing newsletters, newsheets and academic journals and by holding meetings of its members as a forum for debate about adult education in Ireland. It also organises an Annual Conference and seminars, lobbies the State and other public bodies on behalf of adult education, maintains international links and develops particular aspects of adult education provision. Through all of these varied activities, AONTAS acts as the lynchpin in the development of adult education in Ireland.



### **International Contacts**

Adult education is one of the fastest growing areas of education as more and more people realise the importance and necessity of maintaining and developing education, knowledge and information throughout one's whole life. There are many exciting new developments taking place in adult education throughout the world. A small minority of individuals involved in adult education in Ireland have been able to visit other countries to learn about these new developments and to share their ideas so that they can introduce change in the Irish system. This international contact is important not just so that we can go and learn from our international friends but that they can come and learn from us.

The problem is that foreign travel out of Ireland is expensive and travel expenses, particularly for those involved in adult education, have been reduced to a minimum.

As part of its attempt to maintain international contacts and to learn about new developments in other countries, AONTAS has organised a number of study tours for its members, as well as hosting visits from abroad.

AONTAS has paid particular attention to developing links with the Northern Ireland Council for Continuing Education. As well as respective study tours to the North (1981) and South (1985), they participate regularly in each other's conferences and seminars. In 1985, AONTAS and the Council submitted jointly to the Departments of Education in the South and North proposals for new or improved links and cross-border co-operation in the field of adult education. Discussions have taken place about the possibility of establishing an all-Ireland Residential Centre for Adult Education and collaborating in the publishing of a Journal of Adult Education. In 1988, the AONTAS Women's Group in conjunction with the Women's Education Project Belfast organised two Tutor Training week-ends which brought together tutors in women's education.

AONTAS also maintains international links through its library which receives a wide range of publications from abroad.

AONTAS has always been mindful of the necessity to maintain and develop links with sister organisations, particularly, in the United Kingdom:

Northern Ireland Council for Continuing Education  
(NICCE)

National Institute for Adult and Continuing Education  
for England and Wales (NIACE)

Scottish Institute of Adult and Continuing Education  
(SIACE)

AONTAS is also a member of the:

European Bureau of Adult Education

International Federation of Workers Education  
Associations

International Council for Community Education.

Many of the changes that are now taking place in adult education in Ireland are due to initiatives coming from Europe. There is no doubt that this trend will continue to grow towards the end of the century, particularly within the context of an expanded European Market. However, unless those involved in adult education make a deliberate conscious effort to participate in European adult education activities through exchange of information, study visits, and attendance at meetings, seminars and conferences, that when the rest of European adult educators are uniting in a common task and forming stronger links, we will be more marginalised than ever.

### **What Needs to be Done?**

1. All those involved in adult education, whether they are providers or participants, should be encouraged to become members of AONTAS.

2. AONTAS's position as the National Association of Adult Education and the forum for the development of adult education should be strengthened through increased Government support and funding.

3. Efforts should be made through AONTAS to develop international links with agencies involved in adult education in other countries, particularly those with the

### **Further reading**

Farmer, Anna, ed. *The Developing World*. Dublin: DESCC, 1989.

*Continuing Education: From Policies to Practice*. Leicester: Advisory Council for Adult and Continuing Education, 1982.

Grabowski, Stanley M. *Preparing Educators of Adults*. London: Jossey-Bass, 1981.

## Conclusion

Adult Education is a wonderful thing. We need to celebrate learning and the fact that so many people in Ireland continue their education throughout their lives. We should bury for once and for all the notion that education stops after school or college. We should become more positive and supportive about people learning throughout their lives and learning in an adult way, with more emphasis on what they like, when they like and how they like. The secret of adult education is a continuous kindling of the love of learning, of the importance of education and of being open to change. Learning something new means that people can take control of their lives and fulfill their needs and interests. A well-educated person is a huge resource. We pride ourselves on being among the best educated people in Europe, but our system of adult education is inadequate and out of date. At the end of the day, we may not have the best climate; we may not have the best land; we may not have many natural resources; but if we are open to learning and adult education, we will go a long way.

In this report we have tried to give a comprehensive description and analysis of adult education in Ireland, the way in which it is organised and suggestions as to how it could be improved. We have argued throughout that adult education in Ireland is undervalued and misunderstood. Indeed this was the very reason the report was written. We wanted to give the ordinary concerned citizen a systematic evaluation of the scene in Ireland and what needs to be done to improve it. We have provided a theoretical foundation for understanding the different types of learning that take place in adult education and argue that critical learning, i.e., being able to reflect critically about oneself and the society in which one lives should be a key component of all adult education courses and programmes.

In looking at the existing system of adult education, we concentrated on the structure and organisation, priority groups and special areas, access to education by adults, and the development of the existing systems. Each of these broad areas was shown to have important sub-themes within them. We would hope that in providing a broad description of adult education in Ireland we have helped people realise the complexity of the area and the issues involved. These chapters provide a general overview, but they by no means provide a complete picture. We are fully aware that some details have been left out and that others have not been given as much attention as some people think they deserve.

This report is not the absolute word about adult education in Ireland, nor would we like anyone to think it was. Its purpose is to stimulate discussion and to encourage people to come forward with their own understanding and vision of adult education in Ireland, so that through public discussion and debate it can gain its proper place in social and cultural life. This report is part of the key role that AONTAS plays in helping to promote, support and develop adult education in Ireland.

Throughout the report, after having identified and described a particular area of adult education, we made some specific suggestions as to how this system might be improved. What follows are our general recommendations.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. A Development Plan For Adult Education

The importance of lifelong learning and continuing education will become even more crucial to economic and social development in an expanded European Market operating with the latest information technology. There is a need for the Government to devise an overall plan for Adult Education to meet these needs. This report is part of this process. It is a contribution on behalf of AONTAS to this discussion.

### 2. Proper Funding

Adult Education requires proper funding and support from the Government to ensure that it meets the educational needs and interests of all adults, particularly those with limited means and resources and without basic educational qualifications. As an immediate and initial response, adult education requires at least 1% of the total education budget to fund the projects and initiatives put forward in the body of this report.

### 3. Organisation and Structure

There is a need to develop the organisational structure of adult education to encompass all the different aspects of adult education in which policy makers, administrators, organisers, providers and participants are involved. Proposed structures for adult education in Ireland were put forward by both the Murphy and the Kenny Commission Reports but the problem is that these have only been partially implemented.

### 4. Programme Development

If it is to be relevant, adult education must respond to the changing needs and interests of adult learners. Funds and resources must be made available to devise up to date courses and programmes based on modern methods of adult learning.

### 5. Access

Every adult, especially those with little or no educational qualification, should be given encouragement and support to engage in adult education. Lack of money should not be a barrier to education at any stage of life. There is a need to ensure that all educational resources, particularly schools, colleges and universities, are made available to adult learners.

### 6. Accreditation

Our system of educational awards is out of date. We need to move quickly to a situation in which every form of systematic learning can, if the learner so wishes, be formally credited with an educational award which is nationally and internationally recognised.

