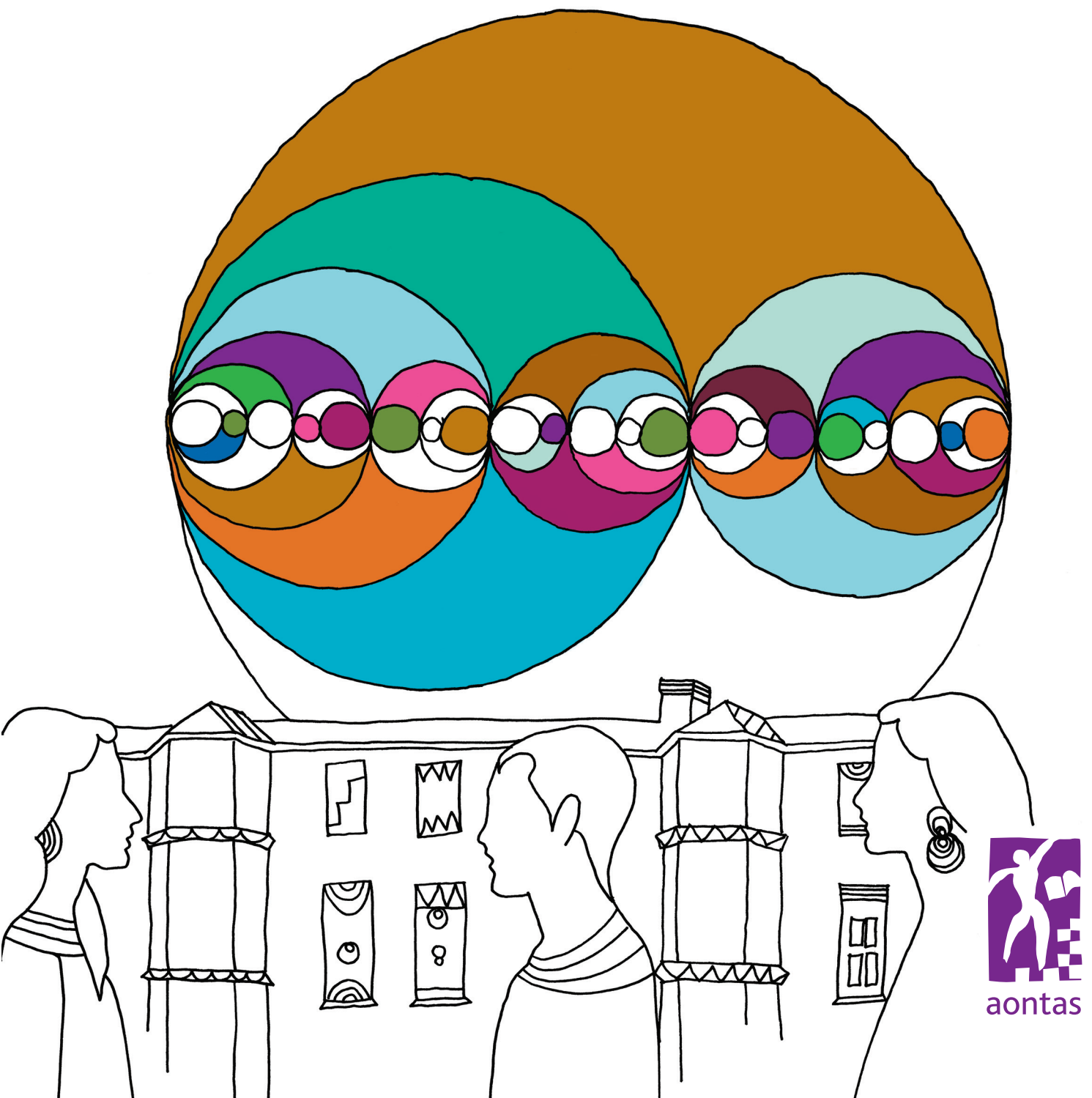


# SOWING THE SEEDS OF SOCIAL CHANGE

The Outcomes and Impact of a Social  
Action Model of Community Education

Research Report AONTAS 2011





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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

AONTAS and the researcher wish to thank all of the learner groups and their centres who took part in the research. They are as follows:

Access 2000	<i>ECDL</i>
An Cosan	<i>Community Development L5</i>
An Cosan	<i>BTEI</i>
An Cosan	<i>Basic English</i>
Blayne Blades (also case study)	<i>Coping Skills</i>
Bray Travellers CDG	<i>Youth studies</i>
Community Training and Education Centre (C.T.E.C.) Wexford	<i>Arts and Crafts</i>
Croi na Gallimhe (also case study)	<i>Computers 1</i>
Henrietta Adult and Community Education Centre	<i>Yoga</i>
Little Bray Family Resource Centre	<i>Silver Surfers Computer Group</i>
Longford Women's Link	<i>Manifesto Group</i>
Longford Women's Link	<i>Montessori FETAC Level 6</i>
Loreto Centre	<i>Dancing the Rainbow</i>
Loreto Centre	<i>Tuesday Time Out</i>
MAIN (also case study)	<i>Arts and Crafts</i>
Meitheal Mara	<i>City Links</i>
Mevagh Family Resource Centre	<i>Gardening</i>
Mullingar Congress Centre	<i>Reception Skills</i>
Our Lady of Lourdes	<i>Literacy</i>
Our Lady of Lourdes	<i>Yoga</i>
RADE	<i>FETAC Level 5 Award</i>
Ronanstown CDP	<i>Active Retirement</i>
Rowlagh Women's Group	<i>DIY</i>
Southhill Family Resource Centre	<i>Southside Disability Group</i>
St. Catherine's Community Services Centre (also case study)	<i>Basketmaking</i>
St. Mary's Adult Education Group	<i>Irish Conversation</i>

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St. Munchin's Family Resource Centre	<i>Tai Chi</i>
St. Munchin's Family Resource Centre	<i>Reception Skills L5</i>
South West Wexford Community Development Project	<i>Payroll FETAC Level 5</i>
Knockenrawley Resource Centre (also case study)	<i>KITE Programme</i>
Warrenmount Community Education Centre (also case study)	<i>Life Skills to Work Skills</i>
Warrenmount Community Education Centre (also case study)	<i>Computer Literacy L3</i>
Waterford Women's Centre	<i>Time for me</i>
Women Of the North West	<i>Learning Forum</i>

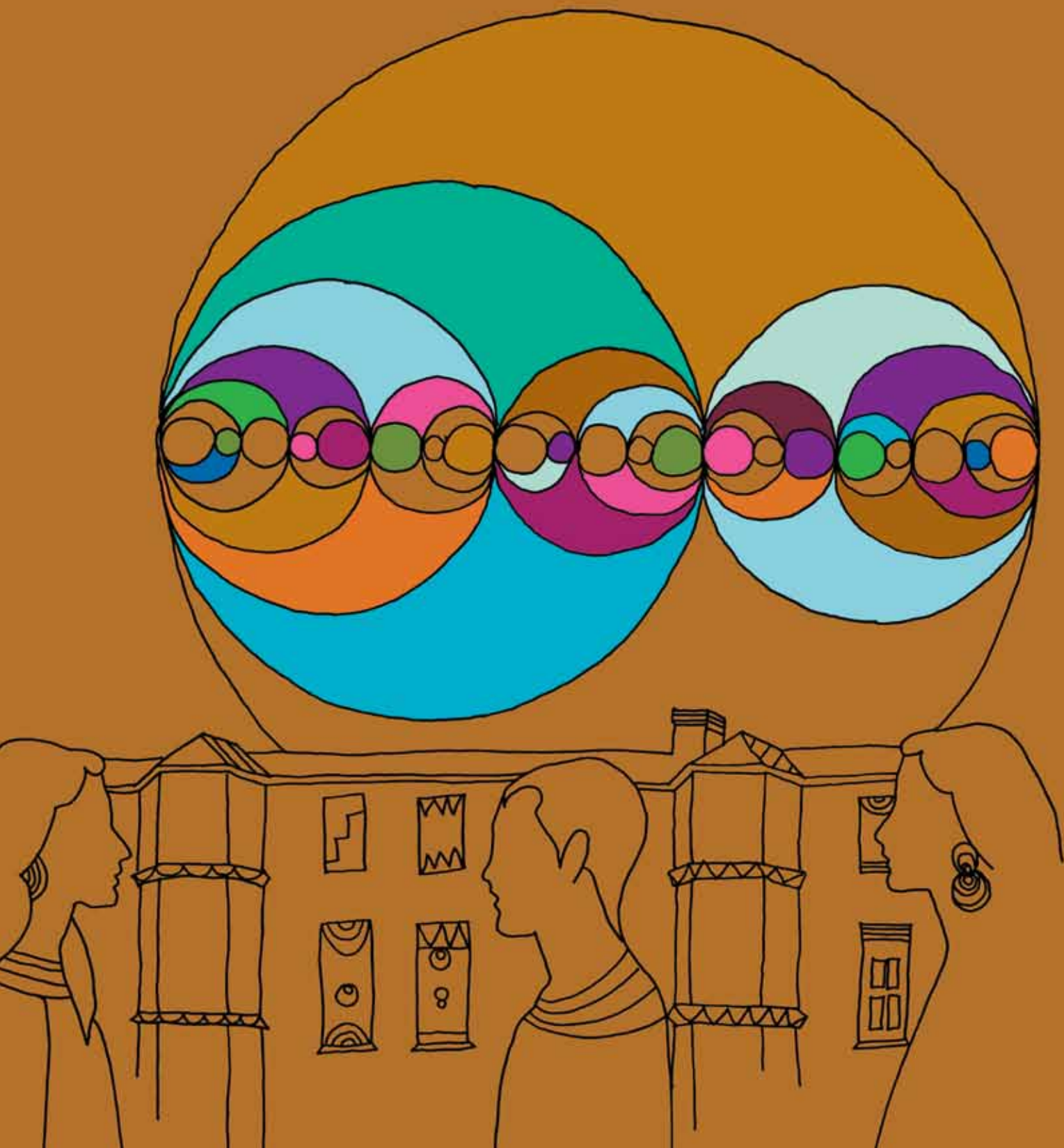
The views in this report are entirely the views of the principal researcher and do not necessarily reflect the views of AONTAS or the Department of Education and Skills (DES) who funded the research.

The research team for this project:

Natasha Bailey  
Mark Ward  
Michelle Goodrick

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# 1

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The research described in this report is a companion piece of research to one conducted by AONTAS from 2009-2010 about the outcomes and impact of Department of Education and Skills (DES) funded community education. It answers a call in that research to isolate and investigate the outcomes of community education not wholly funded through DES.

This research explores the learner outcomes and impact of a group of community education centres operating from a distinct model of community education, named in this report as the social action model of community education. The features of this model are: attending to social recognition of learners and addressing barriers to learning; reaching disadvantaged learners; fostering critical reflection; ensuring experiential learning, and preparation for social action and community development. All participating centres are members of the AONTAS Community Education Network (CEN) and the hope is to use this research in the CEN's work to contribute to the visibility and value of community education. A wide variety of benefits to learning were investigated including civic and social engagement, health and progression outcomes.

According to the research about it, DES funded community education implements a variety of different approaches to community education. This research uses the same methodology employed for the DES research such that strategic comparisons can be made between that provision and provision that attempts to implement one approach<sup>1</sup>. The main methods used were a survey<sup>2</sup> of 285 learners from the 27 participating centres, a survey of the managers of all the centres involved, case studies of 6 centres, and interviews with key informants who could have strategic discussions about the model of community education investigated herein. The survey sample was representative of the learners and the types of courses provided across the centres.

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1 Please note that these two pieces are not directly statistically comparable for reasons outlined in the methodology so comparisons are tentative and are used, in the main, to promote discussion as opposed to making statistically valid conclusions.

2 The survey employed for this study was the one used for the DES research with the addition of a small amount of new items. See AONTAS. (2009). *Survey of Learners in Community Education*. AONTAS: Dublin.

## FINDINGS

### Reaching Disadvantaged Learners

- The centres participating in the social action model research are successful in engaging disadvantaged learners and their cohort of learners may be somewhat more disadvantaged than those participating in DES funded community education. The sample for this current piece of research was younger than in the DES research sample, had higher levels of educational disadvantage and higher rates of living in local authority housing. A third of the social action model sample was living at risk of poverty. However, the participation of men, lone parents, ethnic minority and Traveller learners and the homeless in the centres could be improved.
- While engaging in intensive outreach work to attract learners more frequently than personnel surveyed for the DES research, only about a third of social action model centres encouraged participation through staff directly working with learners to move them from home to centre. Yet this work is key to attracting hard-to-reach groups. It was not clear if this work was not carried out by all providers because of resource issues. Case studies show that outreach is instead accomplished by establishing referral relationships with local services.
- Many of the top outcomes measured were more likely to be experienced by those with less than secondary education.

### Attending to Social Recognition and Addressing Barriers

- Those learners experiencing disadvantage lack social recognition, or inequality in respect and recognition causing low self-esteem, borne out by the extent of disadvantage within the sample and that the main motivation for learning expressed by learners was the desire to improve self-confidence.
- Social action model centres are effective at fostering the social recognition of learners shown by high rates of learners indicating tutors/ facilitators had fostered an affective dimension to the learning and the frequent achievement of outcomes by learners related to social recognition such as self confidence, sense of purpose or hope, ability to communicate with others and knowing how to take action on issues that affect them.
- The participating centres provide a wide range of supports to address learner needs and remove barriers to learning. Learners place a high value on the positive disposition of providers to them, which can be seen as another way that they foster social recognition.

## Fostering Critical Reflection

- Social action model centres foster the critical voice of learners and the development of social cognition. There were high rates of learners indicating they experienced affective outcomes, which meant that they increased their understanding and awareness of others and they developed sympathy for those they may have previously judged badly. These findings show how centres create a foundation for social action and civic engagement through an affective dimension to learning.
- However, centres did not frequently engage learners in an explicit critique of discrimination or programmes that encourage it like women's studies, politics, community development or history. These explicit critiques are an important step in encouraging learners to take action or attain civic engagement outcomes.

## Ensuring Experiential Learning

- There was a strong correlation between learner motivations for participation in the social action model sample and the programmes on offer in participating centres. Learners' motivation to obtain qualifications, accreditation and to progress to further education was high. Centres responded to this requirement with the provision of a substantial amount of vocational learning. They also responded to the need to foster social recognition evidenced by the fact that the most frequent type of programme on offer was pre-development learning.
- The results showed that learners' experiences were harnessed in the learning environment and open, collaborative learning groups were created by participating centres. This finding was also borne out by high rates of learners indicating that tutors/facilitators let them plan what they are going to in the course, let them go off track if they were interested in something and encouraged lots of discussion.
- Progression outcomes were high. In particular, many learners wanted to achieve accreditation within their centres.

## Preparation for Community Development and Social Action

- Civic engagement and social action outcomes were those least frequently attained by learners. However, the learning in the centres on offer did result in many learners not formerly engaged in some of the outcomes measured to commence doing so, such as talking to friends or family about politics, registering to vote, voting and donating to a charity. They indicated infrequently that they engaged in more critical forms of active citizenship as a result of community education, such as protesting or becoming involved in local decision-making fora.

- The results raise a question as to whether or not participating centres could do more to encourage explicit connections for learners between the learning they offer and social action, or at least the extent to which they would like to do so.

### **Learning from the Qualitative Data**

- The case studies, in particular, presented a specialist set of competences necessary for implementing the social action model of community education. These were: fostering critical reflection using the Freirean process of connecting personal issues to the structures that create them; knowing the learner individually and being able to offer them tailored supports; using prior learning and life experience to make learning relevant; democratising the learning environment to foster mutual respect; understanding local community issues and requirements; fostering skills that are transferable to community development and civic engagement, and encouraging reflective thinking.
- The strategic interviews stressed the need to more clearly delineate the differences and connections between community development and community education and that its' original radical purpose, as expressed in the social action model, has been diluted.
- Qualitative data showed that the fight to combat disadvantage is seen to happen at provider level through engagement in local and national civil society as opposed to encouraging collective action by learners. However, providers are committed to sowing the seeds of possible social action at the level of the individual learner.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The main conclusions and recommendations are set out below.

### **Successful in Reaching Disadvantaged Learners and addressing Educational Disadvantage**

The providers in this research are successful in reaching disadvantaged learners, which is an important feature of the model of community education explored here, but certain groups, such as men, lone parents, Travellers and non-nationals are under-represented. The research suggests that recruitment of under-represented target groups could be improved with more intensive outreach.

It is notable that when tested for significance those with less than secondary education were more likely to indicate experiencing many of the top outcomes achieved by learners. This finding further confirms how the model of community education here works particularly well for those who have experienced educational disadvantage.

The recommendations arising from this conclusion are:

- Ensure ring fenced funding for intensive outreach in community education.
- Consider carrying out intensive outreach in order to attract the above named target groups into community education provided through the centres.
- Continue to promote the value and role of the social action model of community education for addressing educational disadvantage and the learning supports required.

### **A Social Action Model is Effective**

Since the DES results and the results from this research are not directly statistically comparable, this conclusion is tentative, but it would appear that aspiring to the model of community education explored in this research generally results in somewhat more frequent attainment of the outcomes measured. In order to resource this model outreach work, provision of supports and the development of an integrated response need to be funded, which may only be possible through a distinct funding line for community education.

The recommendations arising from this conclusion are:

- Continue to use the CEN as a forum for highlighting best practice.
- Lobby for ring fenced funding for community education.
- Carry out research isolating the outcomes of other models of community education for comparison.

### **Lack of Social Recognition is a Feature of Disadvantage that is Crucial to Address**

This research confirms the importance of social recognition work with those who are marginalised. This work may result in the high rates of learners experiencing the personal development, personal agency and progression outcomes measured.

The recommendation arising from this research is:

- Promote the rationale for social recognition work in community education and how this differs to other types of adult learning in terms of the target groups for community education and its aims.

## **Teaching in Community Education requires Specialist Training**

The research shows how, in order to implement the elements of the social action model of community education, tutors/ facilitators require a specialist set of competences.

The recommendations arising from this conclusion is:

- Factor the specific competences necessary for the social action model of community education into the continuing professional development of tutors/ facilitators and any standard qualifications for adult educators.
- Ensure that job descriptions and hiring practices encapsulate the key competences required for tutoring/ facilitating community education.
- Develop a model of CPD for the social action model of community education.

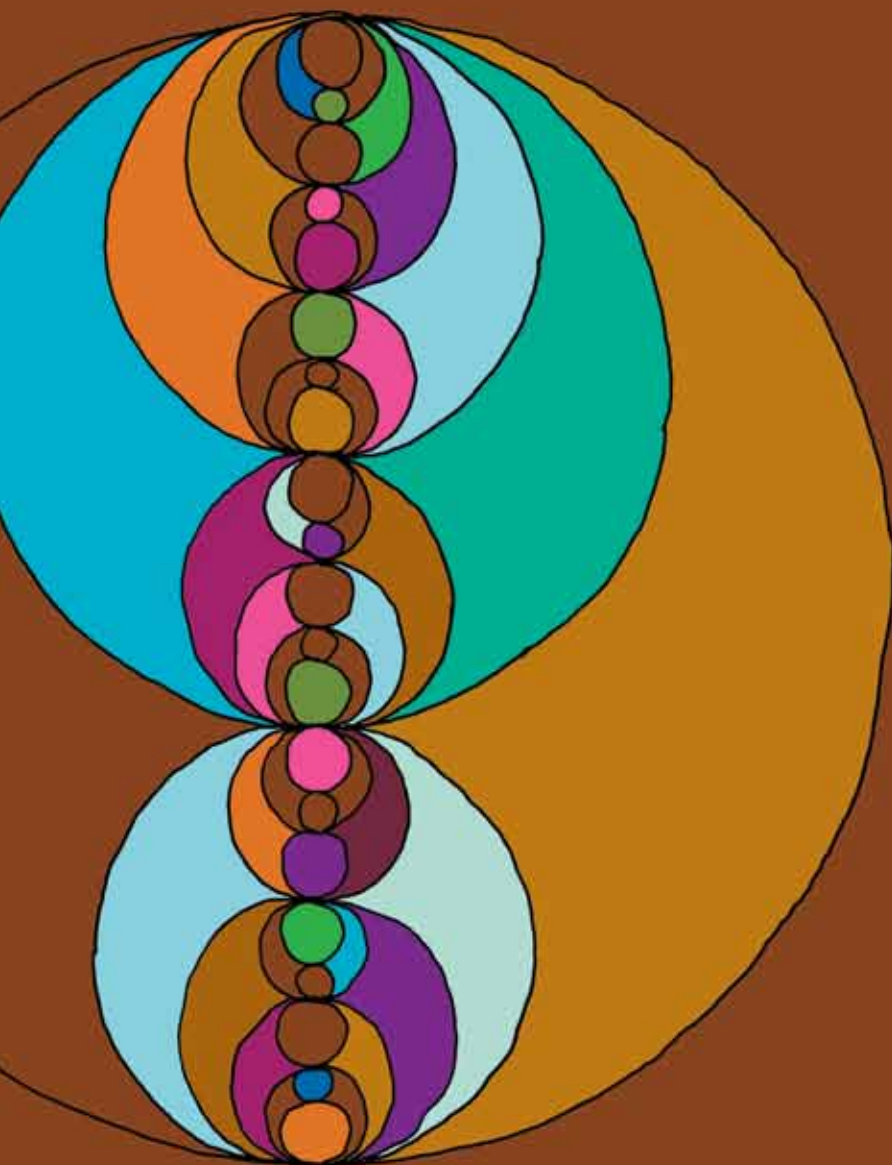
## **Possibilities for Strengthening Potential for Challenging Social Relations and Connection to Social Movements**

The research suggests that there is potential for the participating centres to make a more explicit link between the critical reflection skills they foster in learners and encouragement to challenge social relations through more radical forms of active citizenship rather than just volunteering or voting. The research suggests that centres could discuss the extent to which they would like to: see civic engagement outcomes happen for learners; offer programmes that are about social change learning, and promote their social change ethos to learners. These discussions need to take into account the sometimes oppositional needs of individual learners and the desire of the providers to encourage collective action. Also, social action and civic engagement outcomes may take time to emerge for learners whose personal development and social recognition needs must be dealt with first. Longitudinal research could allow for a more accurate picture of the extent to which these outcomes are attained through the social action model of community education.

## 1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The recommendations arising from this conclusion are:

- Ensure all facilitators/ tutors are trained and facilitated by their centre to carry out this link between critical reflection and social action.
- Reflect on the connections between community education and community development and how it can contribute to local people taking control over decision-making in communities and redistributing resources.
- Reflect on the challenges involved in balancing the opposition between individual and collective needs for the learning in community education and the extent to which providers would like to see learners become involved in social change.
- If social change is part of the ethos of a provider, ensure that this ethos is promoted by tutors/ facilitators to learners.
- Carry out longitudinal research about the outcomes of the social action model of community education to give a more accurate assessment of its capacity to foster participation in community development and social action for learners.



# 2 INTRODUCTION

AONTAS co-ordinates the Community Education Network (CEN), a forum which seeks to give a voice to and improve the visibility of community education<sup>3</sup>. Its membership is comprised of community education centres and projects that receive funding from a variety of sources and are independently managed. From its work with the CEN AONTAS believes that, rather than taking a variety of approaches, these centres operate using a distinct model of community education.

From 2009-2010, AONTAS carried out a piece of research that sought to identify the outcomes and impact of Department of Education and Skills (DES) funded community education<sup>4</sup>. That piece of research found that there were a number of different models of community education implemented by groups and centres funded through the Department. This provision differs to that of the centres in the CEN as some DES funding goes to established centres, but resources also go to informal groups of interested individuals in communities who may only come together for a programme's duration<sup>5</sup>.

On foot of this research, AONTAS was interested in continuing to develop the understanding of the outcomes of community education by investigating what happens for learners when one particular approach to community education is aspired to by organisations. It also wished to collect data that would support the CEN's lobbying work to increase the visibility and perceived value of community education.

Thus, the organisation commissioned research in 2010 to explore the outcomes and impact of community education carried out by centres and projects within the CEN that aspire to a social action model of community education. This approach to education seeks not just to foster the individual development of learners, but the development of skills for community development and social change. As far as possible, the research presented here uses the same design as the DES research so that some tentative comparisons can be drawn between community education provision that implements a variety of models and provision that attempts to execute a single approach.

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3 See [www.aontas.com](http://www.aontas.com) for further information.

4 See Bailey, N. (2010). *More than just a Course: Exploring the Outcomes and Impact of Department of Education and Skills Funded Community Education*. AONTAS: Dublin.

5 DES funding for community education is distributed through two main programmes; the Back to Education Initiative Community Strand, given to groups directly from the Department, and the Adult Literacy and Community Education Scheme (ALCES) given to VECs who then provide resources to groups and centres in their catchments.

## 2 INTRODUCTION

The research presented in this report attempts to show if the participating centres are implementing the process for a social action model of community education and achieving the outcomes associated with it. It is intended as a companion document to the DES research referred to above and should be read in its context. Therefore, it will not include an exhaustive theoretical review as the DES research presents these discussions already<sup>6</sup>.

### AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of the research was:

*To determine the individual, collective and aggregate outcomes of community education provided by independently managed groups that aspire to a social action model of community education.*

The objectives of the research were to:

- From available literature, present the main philosophical debates about radical, transformative education and the social action model of community education.
- Scope the operational environment for independently managed groups.
- Classify providers' philosophical orientations to community education and both the hoped for and achieved outcomes linked to each orientation, including the tutor-learner relationship.
- Document the social, economic and technical barriers independently managed community education providers face.
- Identify the progression routes and other outcomes both desired and achieved by community education learners in these groups and the blocks they face to reaching them, including their views on the NFQ and gaining accreditation through community education.
- Assess the impact of the outcomes achieved by these groups within the research population.
- Compare the findings to those gleaned from the research on the outcomes and impact of DES funded community education.

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<sup>6</sup> In particular the DES research set out a clear rationale for the possible inputs and outcomes of community education so they will not be repeated in this report.

# METHODOLOGY

The following methodology was employed in this study:

- A survey<sup>7</sup> of 285 community education learners from 27 centres/ projects within the Community Education Network who met the self-assessment criteria for the research (see Appendix A), indicating they aspired to the model of community education explored. This survey is representative of the proportion of types of programmes being run across all of the participating centres. At the time of the research, these centres indicated that they were working with 4108 learners. The survey elicited a response rate of 69%, indicating that the findings of the survey are generalisable to the total population of learners across the centres<sup>8</sup>. Results are given as a percentage of the total sample that answered a question excluding those that gave no answer. If low numbers answered a question this will be mentioned in the text. The top three outcomes in each outcome area tracked were significance tested in relation to age, gender, education levels and rural/ urban location.
- A survey of the 27 participating centres to assess their approach to community education.
- Purposive case studies of six of the participating centres including interviews with centre managers, a tutor and two learners – past and present. Case study organisations were chosen so as to show the work of both large and small providers, those newer and more established and for geographical spread.
- Four purposively sampled interviews with key informants about the model and centres investigated through the research.

The profile of survey respondents is available in Chapter 3. Detailed information about the case studies and interviewees is available in Appendix B.

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7 See [www.aontas.com](http://www.aontas.com) *Survey of Learners in Community Education, 2010*. This survey has three parts: demographic profile of the learner; description of experience of community education, and a section examining the civic, social, personal development, physical and progression outcomes a learner achieved as a result of community education.

8 There were a total of 417 learners registered in the learner groups sampled for this research. However, the aimed for sample size was 340. Therefore, the resulting sample size (n=285) means that the confidence interval is 5% and the results are generalisable.

### Limitations of the Study

The main limitations for this research are:

- While tentative comparisons are drawn between the results of this research and the DES research referred to, these two pieces are not strictly statistically comparable for three reasons: 1) the two research populations are not distinct from each other and may overlap; 2) the sample for the DES research was nationally representative – the survey sample for this research was only representative of the participating centres, and 3) the surveys were carried out over two different time periods. Comparisons between the two data sets are considered notable if there is a five percent differential between them in relation to the variables explored. These comparisons are used to generate strategic discussions about community education rather than to make statistically valid conclusions.
- Insights from this research cannot be conclusively generalised to all centres nationally who fit the profile of those that participated in the research, since the survey sample was not nationally representative.
- The six case studies presented may not be representative of the work of all the participating centres.

### Setting the Scene

This section gives a brief overview of the evolution of community education in Ireland and the particular model explored in the research. The findings chapters will contain more detailed theoretical discussions relevant to the data discussed in them.

### Evolution of Community Education

There is general agreement by providers and theorists alike that community education is a distinct form of adult learning where people in their local areas come together to engage in non-formal collaborative learning, which meets their needs and/ or the needs of the community. There are debates about the purpose and appropriate methodologies for that learning, which will be considered below. In Ireland, community education began in the 1980s as a form of adult learning located in disadvantaged areas, which aimed not just to personally develop learners but also respond to social exclusion and develop learners' skills to tackle disadvantage individually and collectively. In other words, community education started as education that prepared learners to be involved in community development. AONTAS has already published a detailed history of community education in Ireland so rather than reproducing that the table below summarises that description and notes key developments since that history was published<sup>9</sup>.

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9 See AONTAS. (2004). *Community Education 2004*. AONTAS: Dublin.

## 2 INTRODUCTION

Year	Development
1980s	Alongside growth of the Adult Education Service, emergence of women's community education groups in disadvantaged areas to combat women's inequality. Supported by religious groups and Adult Education Officers.
1986	Set up of Combat Poverty Agency a State agency, which resourced other local groups that came together to educate themselves to respond to social exclusion in communities throughout Ireland.
1990	Launch of the Community Development Programme (CDP), which allowed a dedicated funding programme for community development projects many of which were engaged in education and training.
1990s	Roll out of the New Opportunities for Women (NOW) and Women's Education Initiative (WEI), funding programmes, which enabled continued development of many women's community education groups.
2000	<p>Publication of White Paper on Adult Education heralding community education as a distinct form of adult education as well as a number of commitments to infrastructure to support its development, such as the Community Education Facilitators (CEFs) and the Back to Education Initiative (BTEI).</p> <p>Roll out of the Education Equality Initiative (EEI) a funding programme that resourced many community education groups.</p>
2000s	<p>Ongoing development of community education as a strand of the Adult Education Services within the VECs where the CEFs were placed. Community education funded through these services or BTEI – Community Strand.</p> <p>Ongoing development of community education projects funded through the CDP or other programmes and perhaps, DES.</p>
2009	<p>Closure of the CDP. Many community development projects engaging in community education are directed by the State to begin a process of amalgamation with their local area-based partnerships. Some CDPs that remain independent can only access funding if they widen their catchment areas and target groups.</p> <p>Integration of the Combat Poverty Agency into the Social Inclusion Division of the Department of Social and Family Affairs. This division is subsequently moved to Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs.</p>

## 2 INTRODUCTION

In 2004, AONTAS detailed the following challenges for community education:

- Accreditation – learning to use the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and engage in quality assurance of provision.
- Finding resources for capacity building of providers, outreach and pre-development for learners.
- Maintaining itself as a distinct strand within the Adult Education Service.

The DES research carried out by AONTAS in 2010 also noted these challenges for the sector. It also noted the difficulty of holding the space for community education that is aimed at social change in the face of an increasing human capital approach to adult learning, which prioritises instrumental learning and skills for the workplace.

A development within the further education sector may impact on the provision of community education. The regulatory body for teaching in Ireland, the Teaching Council, has proposed the development of a teacher education qualification for practitioners working in further education by 2013. This qualification could potentially impact on the requirements necessary for all adult educators and AONTAS sees this development as an opportunity to open up discussion about professionalism in the sector as a whole<sup>10</sup>. The challenge for community education is ensuring that any standard qualification reflects the competences necessary for a community educator.

The history of community education outlined in the table above also reveals a further challenge for community education in Ireland. While it would appear that, up to now, community education has carved a space for itself within adult education funded through DES, the space for community education resourced through community development has diminished.

This situation has ramifications for provision in the type of centre explored in this piece of research since many of them would have received community development funding, alongside DES funding, and within these programmes there was a clear emphasis on tackling disadvantage in local areas. This commitment is not so clearly held in DES provision where a number of different approaches to community education operate, ranging from education that is fun and social to vocational learning to education for social change<sup>11</sup>.

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10 AONTAS. (2010). "Response to the Further Education Group of the Teaching Council." AONTAS: Dublin.

11 See Bailey, N. (2010). *More than just a Course: Exploring the Outcomes and Impact of Department of Education and Skills Funded Community Education*. AONTAS: Dublin

## 2 INTRODUCTION

The question emerges if community education becomes solely funded through DES will there be continued capacity to carry out community education for social change and community development? The danger is a subversion of these aims to those for adult learning currently in Ireland, which are influenced by the human capital approach outlined above<sup>12</sup>. Resourcing community education that is not solely about vocational, accredited learning, is and will continue to be a hurdle for providers.

Furthermore, those providers resourced for community development work face the challenge of holding a space for community development that is about addressing structural inequality versus an understanding of community development for the co-ordination of local services or economic regeneration<sup>13</sup>. Gaynor describes the Irish State's view of community development, "it substitutes self-help for redistribution, self-reliance for state accountability, in the process contributing towards an ongoing depoliticization of the principles and practice of community development and affording 'ordinary' people little say over the direction of their country and their lives."<sup>14</sup>

Of concern is that a particular assumption about active citizenship in the context of community development prevails in this thinking. This assumption sees that community development's role in encouraging active citizenship is to motivate individuals to help out in their local communities by volunteering versus, "mobilising them to query, question and analyse why this is necessary."<sup>15</sup>

The space may have also diminished for women's community education since anecdotal evidence suggests that many of these groups funded as CDPs have had to begin to cater to other target groups locally and provide opportunities to men in order to retain funding.

Funding challenges seem set to continue in light of the current economic crisis.

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<sup>12</sup> again see *ibid.* for a discussion of this issue.

<sup>13</sup> Lovett, T. (1997). "Community education and community development: The Northern Ireland experience." In *Studies in the Education of Adults*. Apr97, Vol. 29 Issue 1.39-43.

<sup>14</sup> Gaynor, N. (2011). "In-Active citizenship and the depoliticization of community development in Ireland." In *Community Development Journal*. 46 (1) January 2011. 27-41.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

## A Social Action Model of Community Education

Many would argue that this research explores the original understanding of and appropriate purpose for community education. This traditional approach is one that has at its heart the achievement of equality for learners and local and social change to address social exclusion. Thus, it is a radical and political form of adult education.

Historically in Ireland, debates around the appropriate model of community education have centred around whether or not it is a form of social change learning emerging from the community itself, or whether it is adult learning that is community-based and is a service to a community, responding to the individual needs of learners and provided by outside services such as VECs, religious or third level institutions. This debate featured prominently in the White Paper and continues to the present day.

The DES research referred to elaborated on this debate by showing how these two approaches can be further differentiated into four key approaches, detailed by Lovett<sup>16</sup>. They break down according to their purpose and level and are outlined briefly in the table below:

<b>Community Education as a Service</b>	<b>Community Education for Social Change</b>
Community Organisation model – education to people in local areas by outside providers	Community Action model – focused on addressing local social exclusion with some instrumental learning
Community Development model – working closely with local groups to co-ordinate and provide local services to address local problems	Social Action model – focused on academic education for the working class to create fundamental social change

The DES research found that all four of these models are evident in the implementation of ALCES funded community education, but that the main model put into practice is a hybrid between the two service approaches in the table above.

The social action model explored in this research is a hybrid of the two approaches detailed in the social change purpose for community education, called in this research the social action model. Later work by Lovett describes this approach to community education as education with the community and comments on how it can be evaluated.

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

## 2 INTRODUCTION

*It must be judged in terms of capacity building, group development and empowerment, coupled with the achievement of social, economic, cultural and environmental targets and objectives. It involves direct intervention in the life of the community, dealing with adults where they are situated, both geographically and intellectually. It focuses upon the individual's needs in terms of the community, addressing both. Since it is about empowering disadvantaged communities, it is often about challenging and changing social relations<sup>17</sup>.*

In practice, community education providers aiming for this purpose in Ireland work through both local and national decision-making fora to achieve change, providing vocational (instrumental) learning, some academic learning and some community development learning for the communities they are situated in. The extent to which they prepare, empower and involve learners in their work for social change is assessed through this research. In 2004 AONTAS asserted, "it can be said that community education sometimes fails to reach this level and that its transforming effects are limited, nonetheless it is underpinned by this radical theory."<sup>18</sup> This research seeks to understand the situation in 2011.

The research also attempts to understand if the centres that participated in the research are providing the essential inputs necessary to achieve the outcomes attributed to the social action model and the extent to which said outcomes are attained. Further elaboration of these from the literature is set out in relevant chapters, but a brief consideration of these is set out below<sup>19</sup>. The key features of a social action model of community education are:

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17 Lovett, T. (1997). "Community education and community development: The Northern Ireland experience." In *Studies in the Education of Adults*. Apr97, Vol. 29 Issue 1.39-43.

18 AONTAS. (2004). *Community Education 2004*. AONTAS: Dublin. 19.

19 These are summarised from a number of different sources. See the DES research referred to as well as AONTAS. (2004). *Community Education 2004*. AONTAS: Dublin, Connolly, Brid. (2003). "Community Education: listening to the Voices." *The Adult Learner*. 2003. Or consider WERRC. (2001). *Women at the Forefront: the Role of Women's Community Education Groups in Combating Poverty and Disadvantage*. AONTAS: Dublin. Or AONTAS. (2009). *Flower Power: best Practice Guide to Women's Community Education*. AONTAS: Dublin.

## 2 INTRODUCTION

- **Reaching disadvantaged learners**

Community education targets those who are most marginalised. In particular, it reaches adults who are educationally disadvantaged. In order to do so providers engage in outreach such as door-to-door visits and proactively developing referral relationships with local service providers. The outcome of this work is that the most marginalised are involved in the learning.

- **Social recognition and attention to barriers**

Community education is holistic, attending to the needs of learners in defining content, but also in terms of assisting them to overcome barriers to learning. To address barriers and assist with persistence in learning, providers provide a range of supports to assist learners ranging from, amongst others, individual check-ins to see how the learner is getting on, to service referrals if the learner needs them. Community education recognises that learners lack social recognition or a sense of self worth and value due to discrimination and that without it they cannot engage in learning or progress. To achieve recognition they engage in dedicated personal development, but also provide warm, welcoming environments and consistent praise and encouragement. Outcomes for this work include the development of individual agency to address problems in their lives, progression, increased self-esteem and better mental health.

- **Fostering critical reflection**

In order to empower learners to become involved in social change, if they so choose, community education develops in learners an understanding of discrimination and oppression and the skill to question the world around them. It relates personal experience to the structures in society that shape them through such methods as critical media reflection, relating the local to the global and social analysis. This work helps learners to develop a shared collective identity and a sense that they can act to make changes. Outcomes of this work include increased engagement with the media, the development of trust and tolerance for others, an understanding of inequality and awareness of the links between the local and the global.

## 2 INTRODUCTION

- **Experiential learning**

Community education starts with where learners are at to define curriculum and involving them in deriving content for programmes. In learning daily experience is used to make theories relevant. The group becomes a resource for the learning, sharing their experiences and then applying abstract knowledge to them. In order to accomplish this task participatory methods are used, involving discussion and peer support. The facilitator/ tutor works to ensure relationships of equality between themselves and learners and amongst learners. We know if community education has implemented this process because learners describe relationships of equality, that learning happens according to their direction and that they learn from each other.

- **Preparation for community development and social change**

Empowering learners to act involves a number of tasks. Facilitators model democracy in the learning environment through the creation of relationships of equality mentioned above, but also by involving learners in key skills needed to contribute to participatory democracy such as problem-definition, identification of local needs, problem-solving, exploration of political systems and decision-making structures and the development of critical reflection named above. Providers also sometimes ensure links to civic engagement opportunities within and outside the centre. Outcomes for this work include an increased sense of community cohesion, groups of learners working to carry out social change actions and individual learners moving into opportunities for civic engagement.

The features named above are not exclusive of each other and are mutually reinforcing. The DES research proposed that it is these key features that work to ensure civic outcomes, or those related to community development and social change. It also tentatively concluded that established, independently managed centres, practicing this model, with clear links to local civic society may ensure that more learners become involved in civic engagement than those in community education groups where an alternative model was executed.

### **FORMAT OF REPORT**

The report is laid out in chapters that explore the key features of community education named in the last section so that the reader can see the extent to which participating centres were implementing the required inputs for each feature and achieving the related outcomes with learners. There are also two chapters detailing the qualitative findings for the research. The chapters are as follows:

- Reaching disadvantaged learners
- Social recognition and attention to barriers
- Fostering critical reflection
- Experiential learning
- Preparation for community development and social change
- Community education in practice – research case studies
- Conversations about community education – interview findings
- Conclusions and recommendations

# 3 REACHING DISADVANTAGED LEARNERS

This chapter briefly explores the concepts of deprivation and educational disadvantage as well as results from the learners' survey and organisational surveys about the demographic profile of learners, and the methods used to target them.

## BACKGROUND

As already discussed in the DES research, there is a State emphasis on the provision of community education to disadvantaged target groups<sup>20</sup>. There is little doubt that social exclusion experienced by the emphasised target groups is both a cause and effect of educational disadvantage. The Combat Poverty Agency defined social exclusion as:

*The process whereby certain groups are pushed to the margins of society and prevented from participating fully by virtue of their poverty, low education or inadequate life skills. This distances them from job, income and education opportunities as well as social and community networks. They have little access to power and decision-making bodies and little chance of influencing decisions or policies that affect them, and little chance of bettering their standard of living<sup>21</sup>.*

Community education works to engage learners experiencing social exclusion through intensive outreach and pre-development programmes such that learners can progress to accrue educational advantage or work to address discrimination. The literature on engaging disadvantaged learners asserts that a number of strategies can be used to reach them and encourage them to participate, including, "door to door visits; community consultation; peer-support groups; one-to-one mentoring; and a gateway project where the project became a referral agency for the target group."<sup>22</sup>

A longstanding challenge in the work to execute a social action model of community education is to avoid the objectification of learners and a remedial focus to the education. Community education should not, as Fletcher describes, be a spectator of disadvantage

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20 These groups are: people with disabilities, substance misuser, ex-offenders, early school leavers and those with less than upper second level education, lone parents, Travellers, homeless people, ESOL participants, refugees and asylum-seekers, those who are unemployed, migrant workers and older people. Except for older people these target groups mirror those to be targeted to meet European Social Fund requirements and prioritised in the *National Action Plan for Social Inclusions*, 2007-2016. Their participation is tracked in both BTEI – Community Strand and ALCES reporting templates.

21 [www.cpa.ie](http://www.cpa.ie)

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

### 3 REACHING DISADVANTAGED LEARNERS

and should involve their learners directly in provision and social action<sup>23</sup>. Learners should not be perceived as suffering from some kind of pathology that requires education to help them adjust to the system as it currently exists. Within this frame and a human capital focus for adult learning community education becomes solely focused on ensuring that learners should be educated to become economically productive members of society and key outcomes are progression to education, training and employment.

As early as 1983 Lovett et al. proposed that community education should of course foster personal fulfilment, which for learners is often a desire to progress in the ways named, but should also support social action:

*Whereas the social pathology approach views community education as a means of providing remedial education for the disadvantaged the liberal/reform tradition views it as a means of reaching the broad bulk of the working class, assisting individual growth and fulfilment and providing support for those engaged in community action<sup>24</sup>.*

In subsequent chapters, this research hopes to identify the extent to which learners are subjects of the community education provided by the centres that participated in the research. This chapter focuses on the extent to which participating centres target disadvantaged learners.

#### Findings from DES Research

The research about DES funded community education found that 74% of learners involved in ALCES funded community education were from one of the priority target groups, but that there was an over representation of women (85%) and older people (48% were 55+). Rates of educational disadvantage were higher than the national figures (45% of survey participants left school at lower secondary or before compared to 34% nationally), and long-term unemployment and unemployment was double the national rate at that time. The research concluded that a challenge for targeting and recruiting disadvantaged learners was increasing the representation of harder to reach groups in ALCES funded community education, such as lone parents, men and early school leavers.

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

24 Lovett et al. (1983). *Adult Education and Community Action*. Croom Helm: Australia.

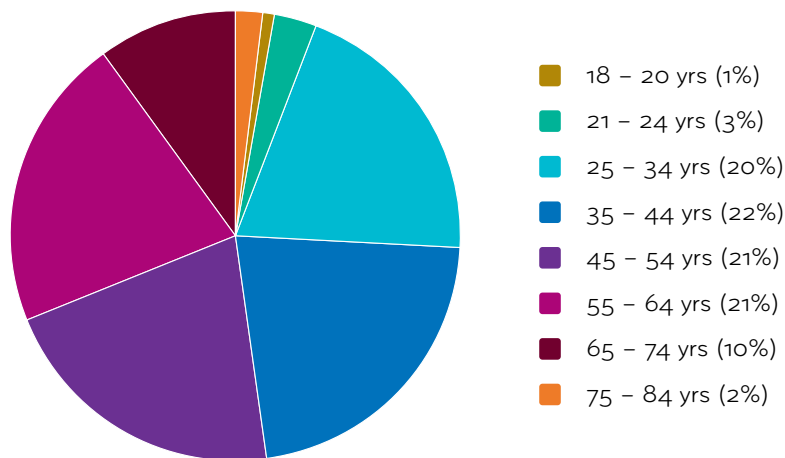
## RELEVANT RESULTS SOCIAL ACTION MODEL RESEARCH

This section details the profile of survey respondents to the current piece of research as well as whether or not they experienced intensive outreach work to attract and recruit them to community education. Also considered is the extent to which providers carried out or perceived outreach work as an important facet of the work of community education.

### Profile of Survey Respondents

Approximately 285 learners completed the survey used for this research. Seventy-six percent were female and 24% were male. The age breakdown for the sample is set out below.

**Figure 3.1 Percentage Age of Learners**



From the figure above we can see that 33% of participants were over 55 years of age with the bulk of the rest between the ages of 21 to 54 years of age (66%). These rates show that 88% of the sample was of working age. Sixty-eight percent of the sample indicated that they lived in an urban area with the remainder from small towns and villages or rural areas. These figures are consistent with the fact that most of the centres that took part in the research are located in urban areas.

Thirty-two percent of the learners were single. A further 45% were married while 13% were separated or divorced, 7% were widowed and 3% were cohabiting. Of those who were single, separated, divorced or widowed around 20% said that they had dependent children. Ten percent of the learners indicated they were in receipt of the One Parent

### 3 REACHING DISADVANTAGED LEARNERS

Family Payment. The average household composition was two people over 14 years of age and one child under 14 years of age.

About 10% of the sample said that they were not Irish, which is in line with the national population. Eighty-one percent indicated they were 'white Irish' and 8% indicated they were Irish Traveller. Only 14 participants identified themselves as black or Asian.

Around 27% of learners indicated experiencing a disability or long-term condition. The most frequently named issue was a condition that seriously limits basic physical activities (13%).

Fifty percent of the sample indicated they were homeowners and 25% were renting from a local authority. At national level only seven percent of households were in rented local authority housing<sup>25</sup>. In the DES research 73% of learners surveyed were homeowners and 12% were renting from the local authority.

#### **Education and Employment**

Learners were asked to indicate their education level when they left school for the first time. These are considered below in comparison with the national figures as well as the figures from the DES research.

**Table 3.1 Percentage Education Level when left School for the first Time**

<b>Education Level</b>	<b>Social Action Model Research Sample</b>	<b>DES Research Sample</b>	<b>National Population</b>
<b>No formal education</b>	3	1	12 (across both categories) <sup>26</sup>
<b>Primary level or similar</b>	24	15	
<b>Lower secondary level</b>	31	29	18
<b>Upper secondary level</b>	30	35	27
<b>Apprenticeship, vocational, trade or craft</b>	5	8	11
<b>3rd level qualification</b>	7	11	23

<sup>25</sup> www.cso.ie According to Census 2006 105, 509 households were in this type of occupancy of a total of 1,462, 296

<sup>26</sup> Taken from CSO. (2010). *Quarterly National Household Survey, Educational Attainment – Q2 2000 to Q2 2010*. CSO: Ireland.

### 3 REACHING DISADVANTAGED LEARNERS

From the table above we can see that 58% of learners left school with lower secondary education or less and 27% with primary or no formal education. These figures are higher than for those in ALCES funded community education (45%) and the national population (30%). Rates of post-secondary education in the sample are also very low. Those who left school at lower secondary or before tended to be between the ages of 45-64.

The table below shows the employment status of the sample against the national profile and the DES research sample.

**Figure 3.2 Percentage Employment Status<sup>27</sup>**



<sup>27</sup> National figures are taken from the Quarterly National Household Survey figures for principal economic status aged 15 and over. See [www.cso.ie](http://www.cso.ie).

### 3 REACHING DISADVANTAGED LEARNERS

If we recalculate unemployment in the sample for those of working age (between the ages of 16-64) we can see that 22% of this cohort is unemployed or looking for their first regular job. The national unemployment rate is currently 14.3%, and the long-term unemployment rate is 7.7%<sup>28</sup>. About 16% of the research sample indicated they were long-term unemployed.

Seventy-five percent of the learners surveyed were in receipt of at least one social welfare entitlement excluding the medical card. Thirty-seven percent indicated they were on one of the main payments or allowances. Sixteen percent said they were on Supplementary Welfare Allowance, 12% on Disability Allowance and a further 12% on Jobseekers Allowance. Thirty percent of the sample said they were in receipt of the medical card.

**Table 3.2 Learners Weekly Household Disposable Income Before and After Community Education**

Euros	Before		After	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Less than 100 per week	30	15.9	20	10.4
101-200 per week	55	29.1	44	22.9
201-300 per week	56	29.6	51	26.6
301-400 per week	23	12.2	45	23.4
401-500 per week	12	6.3	18	9.4
501-600 per week	6	3.2	5	2.6
601-700 per week	5	2.6	4	2.1
701-800 per week	1	.5	3	1.6
801-900 per week	1	.5	2	1.0
<b>Total</b>	189	100.0	192	100.0

We can see from the table above that most of the learners who answered the question on income indicated that their weekly disposable income after community education was below 300 euro per week. For 33% of the sample their income was under 200 euro per week. This figure compares to 25% of the DES sample. The table below shows that the

28 CSO. (2011). *Quarterly National Household Survey – Quarter 2, 2011*. CSO. Ireland

### 3 REACHING DISADVANTAGED LEARNERS

average weekly household disposable income of this research sample was 101-200 euro per week before community education and the average after community education was 201-300 per week. Twelve percent of learners who said they were working for pay or profit indicated that they were on a Community Employment Scheme, which may explain, in part, the increase in income for some learners.

**Table 3.3 Average Weekly Income Before and After**

Weekly Income	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
	Before		After	
Mean(average)	101-200 per week		201-300 per week	
Lowest	Less than 100 per week		Less than 100 per week	
Highest	Over 1000 per week		Over 1000 per week	
	Number		%	
% Whose income increased	53		29.4	
% Whose income decreased	10		5.6	
No change	117		65	
Total	180		100	

The average equivalised disposable income in Ireland in 2009 was 23,326 euro per person and the at risk of poverty threshold was 12,064 euro, which is equal to about 232 euro per week<sup>29</sup>. We can see that the average income in this sample is below that of the national average with a significant percentage living at risk of poverty.

#### **Deprivation**

Around 64% of this research sample indicated they experienced one of the deprivation measures tracked through the survey. The survey asked about eight indicators of consistent poverty used nationally in the 2006 Survey on Income and Living Conditions, including not being able to afford new clothes, ordinary living expenses or food<sup>30</sup>. This figure compares to 38% of the DES survey sample and 11.5% of the national population<sup>31</sup>.

29 See CSO. (2010). *Survey on Income and Living Conditions 2009* (SILC). Government Stationary Office: Dublin.

30 See. [www.cso.ie/eusilc](http://www.cso.ie/eusilc).

31 See CSO. (2010). *Survey on Income and Living Conditions 2009* (SILC). Government Stationary Office: Dublin. Comparisons to the national data are to be taken cautiously as the 2009 SILC used an additional two indicators.

### 3 REACHING DISADVANTAGED LEARNERS

The most frequently named indicator was having had problems with money due to ordinary living expenses (59% of those who responded n=258).

#### ***Unpaid Work and Volunteering***

Learners were asked to indicate if they were engaged in unpaid work or volunteering. Twenty-three percent of learners said they were involved in caring work, the majority of those (17%) for one to fourteen hours per week. In the DES research 28% said they were carers.

The rates of volunteering are set out in the table below. Half of the sample said they were involved in some kind of voluntary work, mostly for one to five hours a week (73% of volunteers). At national level 83% of people said they did no voluntary work in the last four weeks and 43% of learners indicated the same in the DES research.

**Table 3.4 Percentage Engaged in Voluntary Work per Week**

<b>Voluntary Work</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Volunteered for social/ charity org in last 4 weeks	21
Volunteered for a religious group or church in last 4 weeks	10
Volunteered for a sports org in last 4 weeks	5
Volunteered for a political or cultural org in last 4 weeks	4
Did some other type of voluntary work in last 4 weeks	18
Did no voluntary work in last 4 weeks	50

From the table above we can see that the most frequently named type of voluntary work was for a social or charity organisation (21%).

#### ***Representation of Disadvantaged Target Groups within the Survey Sample***

Our analysis sought to show how many learners in the sample belonged to one of the priority State target groups for community education tracked through the survey. The results are set out below.

### 3 REACHING DISADVANTAGED LEARNERS

**Table 3.5 Percentage Priority Target Groups for Community Education**

Target Group	Social Action Model Research Sample	DES Research Sample
Unemployed or looking for first paid job (between age 16-64)	22	26
Not Irish nationality/ Traveller	10	9
No formal, primary or lower secondary education only	58	50
Disability (including 'other')	27	36
In receipt of one-parent family payment	10	5
Homeless	0.4	0
Any one of the above	64	74

From the table above we can see that the priority target group most well represented in this sample is those with lower secondary education or less (58%). Rates of lone parents, ethnic minority/ Traveller learners and homeless individuals are low.

### Outreach

Learners in this research were asked if they experienced outreach as part of their recruitment to community education. Thirty-six percent of learners said that a member of staff from the centre/ project had encouraged them to attend<sup>32</sup>. Twenty-six percent of centres indicated that they engaged in face-to-face outreach work where someone from the centre would work with a learner to help them move from home to the group.

Relevant to this theme is the results of the survey question asking learners to indicate how they found out about their current provider. These results are compared to those from the DES research in the table below.

<sup>32</sup> This item was new to the piece of research presented here so cannot be compared to the DES research.

### 3 REACHING DISADVANTAGED LEARNERS

**Table 3.6 Percentage How Learners heard about their Current Provider**

Method	Social Action Model Research Sample	DES Research
Read about it in a poster/ leaflet/ advert	32	27
A friend told me about it	51	49
Someone called to my house/ came up to me on the street	7	5
A community service worker referred me to the course	20	15

The table shows that a slightly higher proportion of learners in this sample (27%) experienced outreach as a method of promotion than in the DES research (20%). The most frequently named form of promotion was word of mouth (51%).

### Analysis

The following points summarise the findings in this chapter:

- There is a high representation of women in the social action model research sample (76%) versus men (24%). However, the representation of men is higher than in the DES research sample.
- The sample surveyed here is much younger than the national cohort of ALCES learners as represented in the DES research. Eighty-eight percent of this sample was working age and 33% were 55+ compared to 48% of the DES sample.
- A significant proportion (25%) of this sample was renting from the local authority.
- There are high levels of educational disadvantage in this sample where 58% of learners left school before lower secondary. This figure is higher than the DES sample.
- Unemployment is high in the sample, but comparable to the DES research. However, the long-term unemployment rate for the cohort surveyed in the current piece of research is double the national rate and the DES figure.
- There are high rates of learners in receipt of social welfare entitlements, but these are comparable to the DES research.
- There is a high rate (64%) of learners in this sample indicating that they experienced one of the deprivation indicators measured. This figure compares to 11.5% nationally and 38% in the DES research. The most frequently named indicator was having problems with money due to ordinary living expenses.

### 3 REACHING DISADVANTAGED LEARNERS

- The proportion of learners in this sample from disadvantaged target groups tracked through the research is lower (64%) than in the DES research (74%).
- Intensive outreach work was experienced by 27% of learners versus 20% in the DES research. Word of mouth was the mode of promotion that was most often named by learners. Thirty-six percent of learners decided to attend their provider with the encouragement of a member of staff.

#### Discussion

It would appear from this analysis that the centres participating in this research are successfully attracting and recruiting disadvantaged learners to the community education they offer. It would also appear that this sample is experiencing somewhat higher levels of disadvantage than those in the DES research. This conclusion is particularly borne out by the levels of educational disadvantage, combined with the age profile of the sample, which was much younger than those in ALCES funded community education.

The DES sample was an older sample with fairly high levels of educational disadvantage. However, this situation is comparable to the national situation where a high proportion of older people have low educational levels. Younger people at national level would generally have higher education levels compared to the sample presented here.

The extent of disadvantage is also borne out by the high levels of those in receipt of welfare entitlements, the levels of those renting from the local authority, the unemployment and long-term unemployment rates, and the significant proportion of those living at risk of poverty.

While the overall proportion of target groups represented in this sample is lower than in the DES sample, age might also be a contributing factor given that an older sample might be more likely to experience disability, which accounted for a larger proportion of learners in the DES research.

There was also a high rate of people in this sample experiencing at least one deprivation indicator. It is hard to know if this cohort would be experiencing deprivation to such a high extent if there was no recession in Ireland, as many people in the State would probably indicate currently, that they are experiencing money problems due to ordinary living expenses.

While the centres here appear to be attracting more men than those in ALCES funded community education, the proportion of men in the sample is quite low, signalling a potential need to increase their representation. This issue is not new for community

### 3 REACHING DISADVANTAGED LEARNERS

education and is an ongoing challenge for the work. Lone parent participation is also low as is that of people living out of home and those who are non-national or Irish Traveller.

The literature asserts that intensive outreach is a key aspect of community education for attracting and recruiting learners. Providers may wish to ask themselves if their levels of outreach work could be increased to assist recruitment of under represented target groups in the work they do, given that only about a third of learners heard about their community education provider through outreach methods.

# 4 SOCIAL RECOGNITION AND ATTENTION TO BARRIERS

This chapter sets out the rationale for an affective dimension to community education or the requirement to address the emotional lives of learners. It presents data from the learners' survey related to this aspect of the social model of community education such as motivation to learn, personal development outcomes, tutor/ facilitator inputs that deal with the affective dimension and outcomes related to the development of agency. It also presents providers' detailing of the supports necessary for community education and the relevance of outcomes related to social recognition.

## BACKGROUND

The need to provide supportive learning environments that seek to redress inequalities in respect and recognition and increase the confidence and self-esteem of learners is a theme in the literature about community education in the context of working with those who are marginalised. It supports the requirement for pre-development work to engage learners before they move into more formal provision and to offer support to learners to help them overcome barriers.

WERRC summarises the need for social recognition work in women's community education, "women experience social disadvantage and so face inequalities of respect and recognition. This is internalised as poor self-esteem, which leads to isolation and to a lack of confidence and low aspirations and expectations."<sup>33</sup> As Amsler says, "political injustices were internalised into the psychological structures of individuals."<sup>34</sup> Therefore, recognition work in community education plays a political role.

Honneth is well known for his thinking on the importance of recognition in education and stresses that, "the worst kind of humiliation is not to see or notice another human being... all forms of social injustice are forms of the maldistribution of recognition."<sup>35</sup> This struggle for recognition can occur at three levels, the family, civil society and the state. At the level of civil society exists the possibility for the individual to be recognised as having rights, autonomy and responsibility. Without this recognition, the individual has low social integrity, "one is not considered a subject of one's action, but rather an object that

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33 WERRC. (2001). *Women at the Forefront: the Role of Women's Community Education Groups in Combating Poverty and Disadvantage*. AONTAS: Dublin. 24.

34 Amsler, S. (2011). "From 'Therapeutic' to Political Education: the Centrality of Affective Sensibility in Critical Pedagogy." In *Critical Studies in Education*. 52(1). 54.

35 Hottunen, R. (2007). "Critical Adult Education and the Political-Philosophical Debate between Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth." In *Educational Theory*. 57(4). 424.

## 4 SOCIAL RECOGNITION AND ATTENTION TO BARRIERS

causally reacts to stimuli. One's moral responsibility remains at an undeveloped stage."<sup>36</sup> Therefore, it is important to actively involve learners, creating ownership and responsibility for their own learning, something that is to be further explored in Chapter 6. Recognition at this level fosters agency.

At the State level, or more commonly understood as the community level, self-esteem is achieved through the recognition of one's value to their community through work. In Honneth's framework, work is understood as a contribution to the common good in some way. If this work is unrecognised then low self-esteem results. According to Honneth the individual suffers from a lack of honor and dignity<sup>37</sup>. Therefore, it is important in education to acknowledge the value of a person's contribution and foster their self-esteem so that they feel they have a further contribution to make.

Connolly asserts that the individual's personal development comes first in community education due to the lack of social recognition as well as to the fact that agency for personal and social change cannot be fostered until a person has the confidence to act. This facet of community education is what separates it from popular education, a form of adult learning that is also aimed at working with disadvantaged groups to gain the skills needed to address discrimination out of an exploration of their daily lives. The difference is that in popular education the first priority is the group and the move to collective social action, whereas in community education:

*The main point of departure is the individual. In community education, the person is perceived as the agent of social change, in collective activity. It is understood that consciousness-raising enables the individual to identify with and connect to others within the same group, class and/ or gender. In community education, personal change is necessary in order to overcome the constraints of socialisation, of passive, unquestioned acceptance of the status quo<sup>38</sup>.*

This focus on the individual means that social action and civic engagement are among a range of outcomes that a learner can choose from once they have social recognition. The confidence attained through recognition work respects the choice of the individual to achieve the goals that they desire for themselves.

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36 Ibid. 427.

37 Ibid.

38 Connolly, B. (2001). "Women's Community Education in Ireland." AONTAS: Dublin.

## 4 SOCIAL RECOGNITION AND ATTENTION TO BARRIERS

This attention to emotion is essential to the development of critical thinking, a feature of community education explored in Chapter 5. Amsler asserts that development of self-esteem and confidence, and bringing emotion into learning is necessary to inspire learners to act and to value the construction of an alternative society. Callahan says, "emotions are essential when individuals make distinctions among an array of possible actions, and they may even be a critical factor of understanding ourselves as conscious individuals in the context of social interaction. Thus, the very praxis of critical theory<sup>39</sup> relies on emotion as its catalyst."<sup>40</sup>

While there is little dispute that radical and political adult learning, such as the social action model of community education, requires an affective dimension some theorists caution that it must be carried out critically. Low self-esteem of learners and lack of confidence must be critiqued and seen as a product of discrimination by learners and the educators who work with them. Otherwise, this work risks socialising learners to cope with and adapt to dehumanising social relations, reinforcing a sense that they are responsible for discrepancies in well-being, "the purpose of education is not to make people feel happy or satisfied with these conditions, but to illuminate the alienated relationship between the material conditions of life and subjective experience."<sup>41</sup>

The inference is that the development of recognition becomes apolitical if critical education does not work on two fronts. Critical education needs to, "work toward a formally just society, but also a decent society where each member can construct his or her own good life in a caring community and strive for self-realisation of one's practical relation-to-self in a reciprocal relation of recognition."<sup>42</sup>

This chapter is concerned with the extent to which participating centres provided inputs and achieved outcomes related to the latter aim described in the last paragraph. The extent to which providers are engaging in the development of critical thinking and moving learners to create a just society is considered in subsequent chapters.

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39 Theory that seeks to critique and question society or the status quo and move people to effect change.

40 Callahan, J. (2004). "Breaking the Cult of Rationality: mindful Awareness of Emotion in the Critical Theory Classroom." In *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*. 102. 75.

41 Amsler, S. (2011). "From 'Therapeutic' to Political Education: the Centrality of Affective Sensibility in Critical Pedagogy." In *Critical Studies in Education*. 52(1). 55

42 Hottunen, R. (2007). "Critical Adult Education and the Political-Philosophical Debate between Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth." In *Educational Theory*. 57(4). 433.

### Findings from DES Research

The DES research referred to throughout this report concluded that the development of recognition for learners has a political role in community education and is the foundation for persistence and success in learning, including the achievement of civic engagement outcomes. Some other key findings were:

- Seventy-eight percent of learners were motivated to become involved in community education to improve their self-confidence. Lack of confidence was the top barrier to participation, although only 17% of learners said that this was a barrier for them, perhaps indicating that DES funded community education works effectively to remove this barrier to learning.
- Providers engaged in intensive work to facilitate access for learners and support their retention. Key factors facilitating access for learners were that the people were really nice (70%) and the surroundings were warm and welcoming (63%). The supports perceived to be key for learners and providers were warm, welcoming surroundings, the experience of dignity and respect for the learner, check-ins with learners and appropriate timing of courses.
- Over half the learners achieved positive change in social engagement outcomes related to increased personal agency such as being a positive role model for children (55%), and confidence in speaking to service providers (57%)
- Achievement of personal development outcomes related to recognition was high. The top three were self-confidence (85%), positive change in sense of purpose or hope (80%) and positive change in happiness (77%).
- Over half of learners said they felt happier and less depressed (53%) and had more control over things that happen to them (53%) as a result of community education.
- Learners agreed or strongly agreed that tutors/ facilitators were friendly (98%), that they were supportive in the learning and really wanted them to do well in the course (98%). Over 80% agreed or strongly agreed that tutors/ facilitators treated them as equals, and 78% that they tutors/ facilitators thought feelings were just as important as ideas.
- Qualitative data showed that learners felt they had experienced relationships with their tutor/ facilitator characterised by respect, equality, encouragement and empathy.

## RELEVANT RESULTS SOCIAL ACTION MODEL RESEARCH

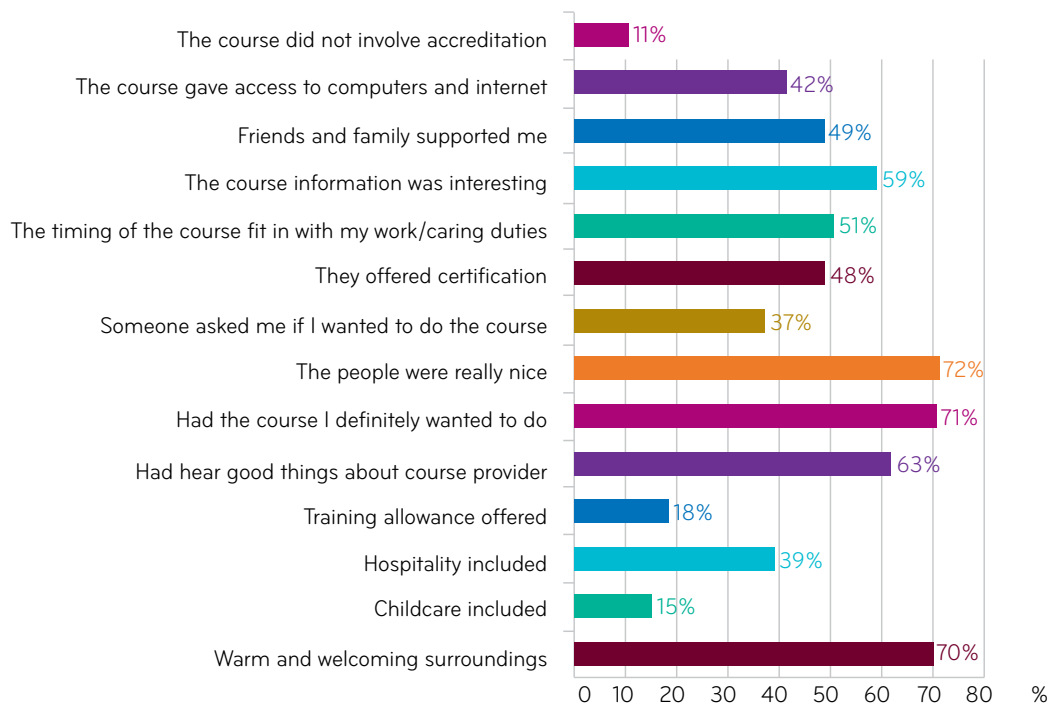
This section presents results from the learners' survey and providers' survey relevant to the development of social recognition and attention to barriers.

### Access, Persistence and Retention

When asked about motivations for participating in community education that relate to social recognition and well-being of learners, 88% of learners surveyed indicated that they were interested in achieving the goal of improving their self-confidence. This motivation was the highest-ranking motivation for learners in this research, whereas in the DES research it came fourth. Forty-three percent of the 225 learners who answered this question said they wanted to improve their health and fitness levels.

In the survey, learners were asked to consider a range of factors and indicate if they helped them make the decision to access their current provider. The figure below shows their responses.

**Figure 4.1 Percentage Factors Facilitating Access**



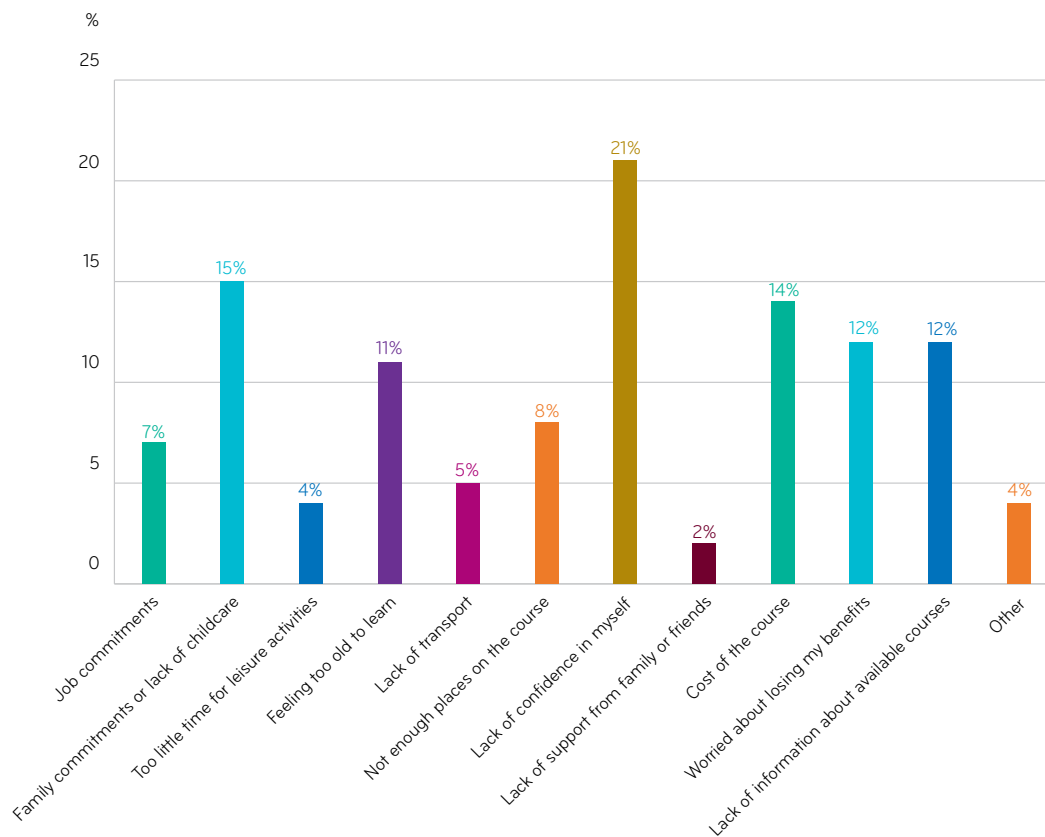
## 4 SOCIAL RECOGNITION AND ATTENTION TO BARRIERS

From the figure above we can see that the top three factors facilitating access were "the people were really nice"(72%), "had the course I definitely wanted to do" (71%) and the surroundings were warm and welcoming (70%). Also of note was that they said they had heard good things about the course provider (63%).

Less important to learners for helping them make their decision were factors related to structural barriers such as training allowance offered (18%) and childcare included (15%). The least frequently named factor facilitating access was the course not involving accreditation (11%).

Learners were also asked about whether or not they had experienced a range of barriers to their participation. The results are available in the figure below.

**Figure 4.2 Percentage Barriers to Participation**



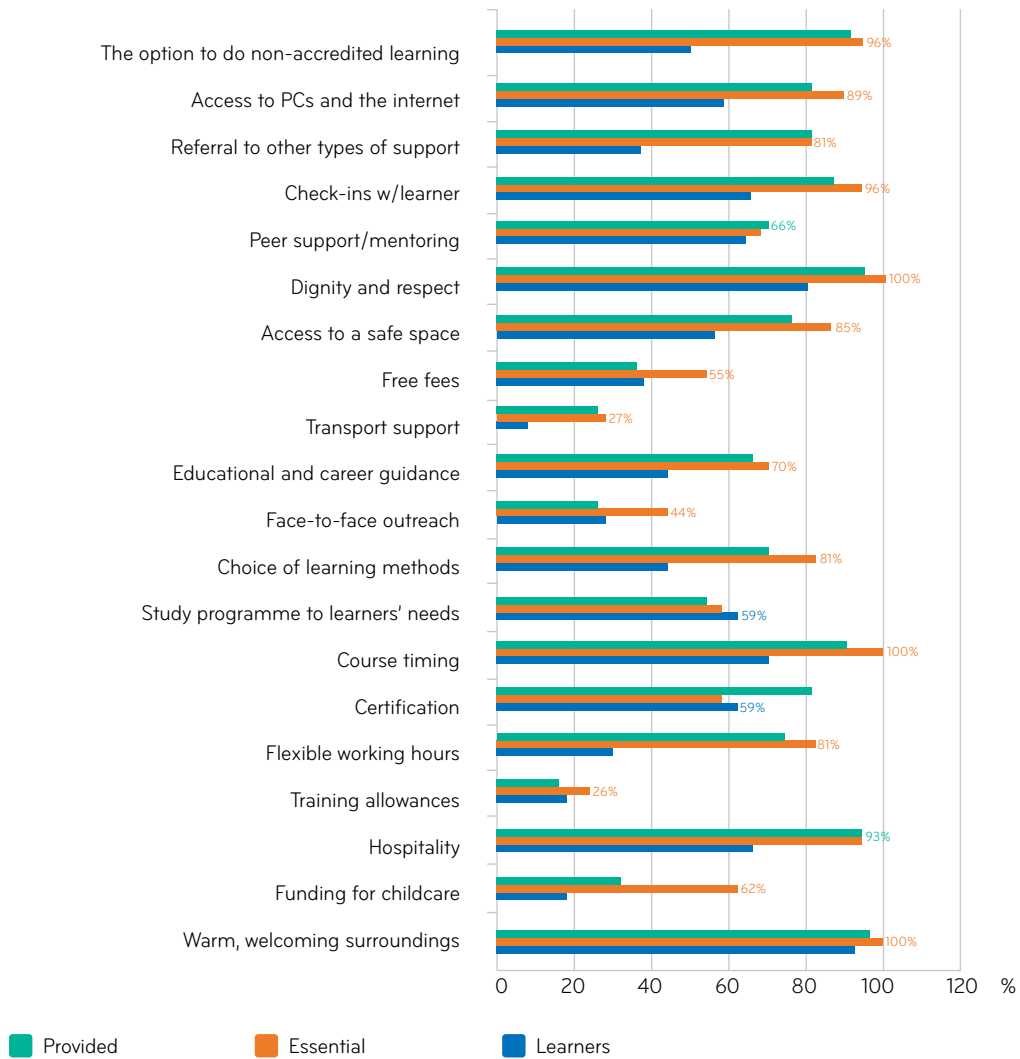
## 4 SOCIAL RECOGNITION AND ATTENTION TO BARRIERS

From the figure above we can see that the top three barriers for the learners surveyed were lack of confidence (21%), family commitments or childcare (15%) and worried about losing my benefits, alongside lack of information about available courses (both 12%). The number of learners experiencing any of the barriers asked about was relatively small. When tested for significance, women were more likely than men to indicate that childcare and cost were significant. Those in rural areas as opposed to urban were more likely to indicate cost as a barrier.

Providers were asked to indicate learner supports that they considered essential for community education and to identify the ones they provided. Learners were asked about their knowledge of the supports that their providers offer. A comparison of responses is set out on Figure 4.3 on the next page.

## 4 SOCIAL RECOGNITION AND ATTENTION TO BARRIERS

**Figure 4.3 Percentage Important and Provided Supports for Participating Centres**



## 4 SOCIAL RECOGNITION AND ATTENTION TO BARRIERS

From the figure above we can see that the top essential and provided supports for participating centres were warm, welcoming surroundings, appropriate course timing, and the provision of dignity and respect to the learner. The importance and actual provision of almost all the supports was high except for transport support and training allowances. We can also see from the table above the learners' awareness of the supports offered by providers, was on the whole, low compared to the frequency with which centres said they provided them.

When providers were asked to consider which supports they considered to be a priority to provide to learners the three most frequently placed in the top three were warm, welcoming surroundings, an experience of dignity and respect for the learner, and check-ins with the learner to see how they are getting on. In general, participating research centres said more frequently than the VECs in the DES research that they provided each of the learners supports tracked. There were two notable differences. VECs said more frequently they provided free fees (70% to 37% of the participating centres) and that they provided outreach (43% of VECs compared to 26% of the participating centres).

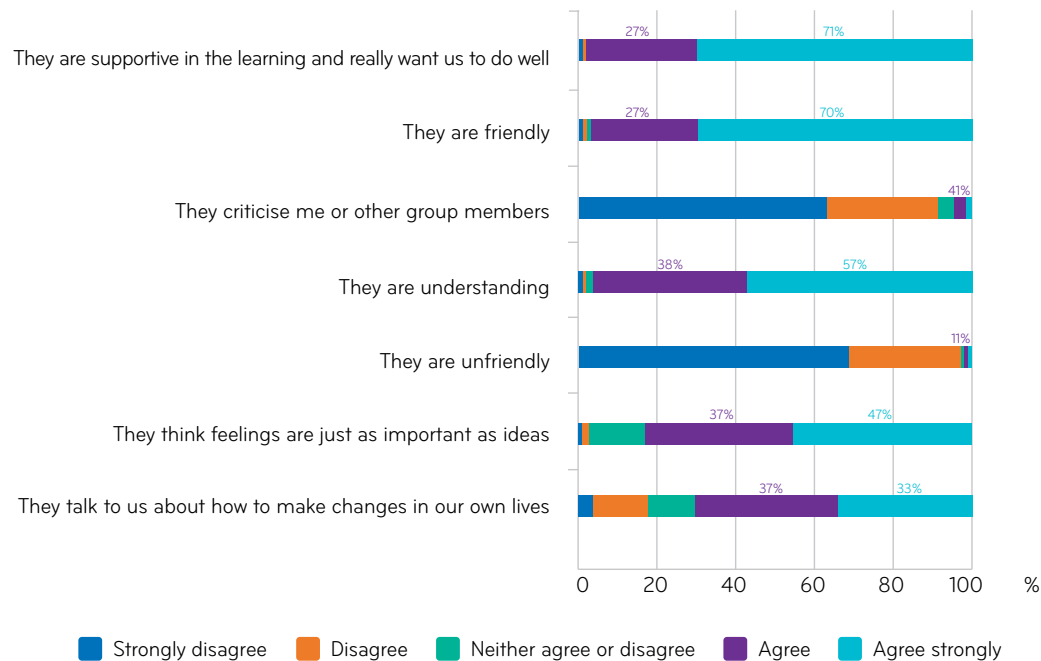
Providers in this research were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with a series of statements about community education's role in fostering social cohesion and well-being. Eighty-nine percent of providers agreed or strongly agreed that community education was about increasing a learner's social networks to decrease isolation while 74% said the same in regard to community education helping to maintain an individual's well-being.

### **Attention to Social Recognition and Affective Dimension in Learning**

Learners were asked the extent to which they agreed with statements that showed how tutors/ facilitators work for social recognition and attend to the affective dimension in learning. The figure below shows their responses to these statements. Learners were highly likely to agree or strongly agree that tutors/ facilitator carried out this work and to disagree that tutors/ facilitators negatively affected self-esteem and confidence by criticising learners or being unfriendly.

## 4 SOCIAL RECOGNITION AND ATTENTION TO BARRIERS

**Figure 4.4 Percentage Extent Tutor Approach to Recognition/Affective Dimension**



When asked the extent to which they agreed with the above statements, centres' responses broadly mirrored those of the learners.

### Outcomes Related to Social Recognition

Participating centres were asked to indicate the perceived level of importance of outcomes related to social recognition for community education in their centre. When asked about the importance of community education working to achieve change in the individual's beliefs about the self and increase self-esteem all 100% of participating centres indicated they saw outcomes related to this dimension as important or very important. Ninety-two percent said that it was important or very important to increase learners' sense of well-being, while 85% said changes in health behaviour were important or very important. Eighty-nine percent said that encouraging the individual to make positive choices about their environment (in terms of work or living conditions) was important or very important.

Learners were asked if they had experienced positive change in relation to a series of outcomes relevant to the development of personal agency, which are the result of social recognition work in community education. The results of the current research are compared to those of the DES research below.

**Table 4.1 Percentage Personal Agency Outcomes**

	Some positive change	Large positive change	Total Social Action Model Research	Total DES Sample
Trying out new activities	36	50	86	88
My confidence in speaking to service providers	35	34	69	57
Greater understanding of the actions I can take when I want an issue dealt with (health, housing etc)	33	31	64	n/a
My confidence in taking on a leadership role	34	30	64	52
My ability to be a positive role model for my children	29	31	60	55
Visiting places I have never visited before	23	35	58	61
Taking part in public speaking	23	21	43	32
How much quality time I spend with children	18	18	36	39

Over 50% of learners indicated experiencing positive change in relation to the majority of personal agency outcomes. The table above shows that the top three personal agency outcomes for learners were trying out new activities (86%), confidence in speaking to service providers (69%) and having a greater understanding of actions they could take when they want an issue dealt with (64%). Learners were less likely to indicate positive change in relation to quality time with children (36%) and taking part in public speaking (43%).

Generally, learners in participating centres indicated the achievement of personal agency outcomes slightly more frequently than those surveyed for the DES research, except in the case of quality time with children, trying out new activities and visiting places I have never visited before although differences between this sample and the DES sample in relation to these three outcomes are small. The differences between the DES sample and this one are particularly notable in relation to positive changes in increased confidence in speaking to service providers and ability to be a positive role model for my children.

Of note is that those with secondary education were less likely than those with lower education levels to report positive change in trying out new activities.

## 4 SOCIAL RECOGNITION AND ATTENTION TO BARRIERS

One question in the survey asked learners to indicate whether or not they had experienced positive change in relation to a range of personal development outcomes, which are also asserted to result from social recognition work in community education. From the table below we can see that the achievement of personal development outcomes for learners in this research was high.

**Table 4.2 Percentage Personal Development Outcomes**

	Some positive change	Large positive change	Total Social Action Model Research	Total DES Sample
Your self confidence	37	53	90	85
Your sense of purpose or hope	44	40	84	80
Your ability to communicate with others	38	45	83	73
Your happiness	39	43	82	77
Your quality of life	39	42	81	73
Your ability to do things by yourself	36	44	80	75
Your ability to tackle problems in your life rather than ignore them	35	44	79	70
Making decisions	42	36	78	66
Asking for support from others	43	34	77	69
Your ability to plan for the future	36	34	70	60
Your trust in others	42	25	67	59
Understanding your rights under Irish equality law	31	25	56	n/a
Your sense of loneliness	31	22	53	52
How well you get along with your family	27	22	49	43
Your general parenting	22	24	46	42
Your confidence in talking to your children about the importance of finishing school	14	31	45	48
Your ability to help your children with their homework	15	17	32	35
Your fear of being a victim of crime	16	13	29	29

## 4 SOCIAL RECOGNITION AND ATTENTION TO BARRIERS

As with the personal agency outcomes over 50% of learners indicated positive change in relation to the majority of personal development outcomes tracked. The top three personal development outcomes for the learners in this sample were self-confidence (90%), sense of purpose or hope (84%) and ability to communicate with others (83%). This ranking differs slightly to the DES research where happiness was the third most frequently named outcome. On the whole, learners in this sample indicated more frequently the achievement of personal development outcomes than the DES research. This trend is notable in the case of positive changes in regard to ability to communicate with others, quality of life, ability to tackle problems rather than ignore them, trust in others, making decisions, and ability to plan for the future.

The outcomes that learners in this research experienced least frequently were confidence in talking to children about the importance of finishing school (45%), ability to help child with homework (32%) and fear of being a victim of crime (29%). However, the frequencies given relate to the overall sample and people who were not parents could indicate that parenting related outcomes were not relevant to them. When looked at in terms of the parents completing the survey (124 individuals indicated they had dependent children) rates of positive change become quite high. For instance, 90% of parents indicated that they had experienced positive change in talking to children about the importance of finishing school.

Women in this sample were more likely than men to indicate positive changes in ability to communicate with others. Those with secondary education were less likely than those with lower education levels to indicate positive changes in relation to this outcome.

Learners were also asked whether or not taking part in community education had impacted on their mental health. The results are compared to those of the DES research in the table below.

**Table 4.3 Percentage How Participation Changed the way Learners feel about Things**

	Social Action Model Research Sample	DES Sample
<b>I feel that I have more control over things that happen to me</b>	68	53
<b>I feel happier and less depressed</b>	61	58
<b>I feel less anxious</b>	59	43
<b>I feel that I cannot change many of the important things in my life [NEG]</b>	14	16
<b>I feel more pushed around in my life [NEG]</b>	8	7
<b>I feel I will never get a chance to succeed [NEG]</b>	.7	3

The table above shows that community education in the participating centres generally did not impact negatively on the mental well-being of learners and instead, for more than half, fostered an increased sense of control over life, feeling less depressed and less anxious. These outcomes were experienced more frequently in this sample than the DES sample and are marked in terms of increased control and feeling less anxious.

When asked to indicate the aspect of the community education experience that was most important in facilitating positive changes in relation to the personal agency, personal development and mental health outcomes, learners said the overall atmosphere in the group (29%) and the way the facilitator/ tutor treated the people taking part in the course (27%) were the most important.

Learners were asked about a series of health behaviours and whether or not they began to do them as a result of community education. The key findings for this question included 31% of learners beginning to eat more fruit and vegetables and 36% beginning to exercise a bit more. Insignificant numbers of learners began to engage in the other health behaviours tracked as a result of community education. These figures are in contrast to 85% of providers surveyed saying that changes in health behaviour were important or very important outcomes of community education.

### ANALYSIS

From the findings presented above we can see that the top motivation for learners to become involved in community education was to improve their self-confidence. Physical health improvements were a motivation for less than half of learners.

The centres in this research carry out considerable work to facilitate access and removal of barriers. Low rates of learners experiencing the barriers tracked may attest to this. Of note, is that the main barrier was lack of confidence experienced by 21% of learners. Taken with the finding that the main motivation for attending was to improve self-confidence we can see that this issue is significant for the cohort.

Main reasons for accessing providers were similar to the DES research and included warm, welcoming surroundings, the people were really nice and the provider had the course they definitely wanted to do. Of note for this sample is that 63% of learners said hearing good things about the course provider had helped them make the decision to attend. These findings show that the type of environment provided by centres is key to facilitating access for learners. Learners were less likely to make the decision to attend their community education centre for reasons linked to structural barriers such as the need for childcare or a training allowance.

The centres in this research provide a wide range of supports for learners. However, generally the awareness of those supports for learners was lower than the reported provision. There could be two reasons for this finding. The first is that supports are individually tailored to learners so they would only be aware of those that they needed. The second, is that providers may need to carry out increased promotion of possible supports to learners. Of note is that providers in this research said less frequently than VECs that they provided the supports of free fees and outreach work.

Tutors/ facilitators in this research attend to the affective dimension in learning. These inputs and the supports provided may result in high rates of personal agency and personal development outcomes for learners. Generally these were experienced more frequently than in the DES research, although not to a high extent. However, notable differences occur in relation to the outcomes of increased confidence in speaking to service providers, ability to communicate with others, quality of life, tackling problems, trust, making decisions and planning for the futures.

Attending to the affective dimension may also seem to result in learners feeling happier and less depressed and more in control over things that happen to them.

### DISCUSSION

The findings in this chapter along with the extent of disadvantage in the sample mapped in the last chapter support the literature indicating that those experiencing disadvantage lack social recognition. This conclusion is borne out by the finding that the main motivation for participation was to improve self-confidence.

The high rate of outcomes related to personal development and personal agency suggest the link between social recognition work and the development of the person to act for themselves. This work is vital in redressing inequality for learners, and the centres in this research are doing this well. In particular, this work helps learners to exert influence over their environments in terms of speaking to service providers, ability to communicate with others and planning for the future. These personal agency outcomes link back to the development of recognition of the individual by civil society as they work to develop a sense of entitlement to rights, autonomy and responsibility.

The link between disadvantage and the need for social recognition is also evident in this sample in terms of those learners with secondary education or more being less likely to indicate the outcomes of trying out new activities and positive change in ability to communicate with others. Therefore, they potentially have less need to achieve them compared to learners with lower educational levels. The high rates of learners indicating that they experienced positive change in their levels of self-esteem, and purpose or hope shows that these centres are working for the social recognition of learners at, as Honneth suggests, the community level.

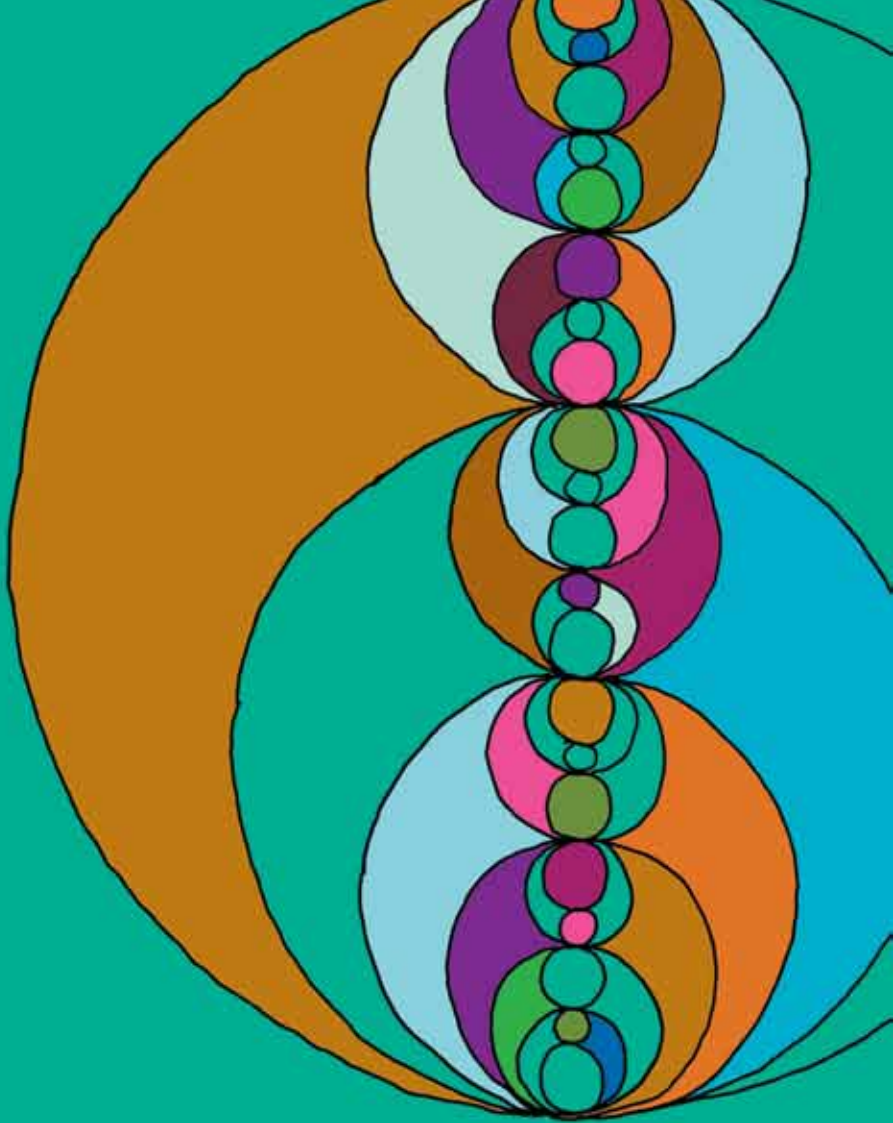
These providers carry out intensive work to facilitate access, remove barriers and support learners. In general the provision of supports tracked was indicated more frequently than in ALCES provision. This finding suggests that the centres may be more well-equipped to provide these supports except in the case of free fees and outreach work. A question arises as to whether or not the infrequent provision of these supports is due to resource constraints for the centres.

#### 4 SOCIAL RECOGNITION AND ATTENTION TO BARRIERS

The low rates of learners indicating structural barriers to learning is surprising given the traditional importance in community education placed on providing childcare, for example. This finding may have emerged because centres have removed the barrier by providing childcare or this barrier has been addressed by other local services. However, in order to draw a clear conclusion we would need more data, including the ages of dependent children in the sample. Childcare might not be an issue for those with school going children. Also, less than half the sample had dependent children.

The importance of attending to the affective dimension of learning and social recognition in community education is also borne out in terms of the frequency with which learners indicated that factors linked to the learning environment helped them make the decision to attend their current centre. The importance placed on people being really nice is an example of this. Within the theoretical paradigm presented in this chapter the positive disposition of providers is a form of social recognition.

The high rates of learners experiencing inputs and outcomes related to the affective dimension of community education sows fertile ground for the achievement of critical reflection since this feature is said to be important to this set of skills in the literature. The extent to which social recognition works to achieve critical thinking and social action, placing learners as subjects in this process, is explored in subsequent chapters.



# 5 CRITICAL REFLECTION

This chapter presents findings from the learners survey about inputs and outcomes of the community education process that fosters learners' skills for critical reflection, as well as the extent to which providers agreed that tutor approaches should promote these skills. The background details how the learning process in community education and critical adult education encourages critical thinking.

## BACKGROUND

In radical adult learning such as the model of community education explored here, education is concerned with changing society from the bottom up, starting with the roots. In order to achieve this kind of change we must learn to view the world differently as a society "characterised by relations of power and domination."<sup>43</sup> This process involves developing an awareness that our taken-for-granted assumptions about the world may not be common-sense or unchangeable fact, but are products of the society around us and may reproduce oppression.

For critical adult and community educators the education system itself has functioned as an institution that has inculcated people into the beliefs and systems that maintain the status quo, or the current way the world works. In particular, the banking model of education, where information is 'poured in' to learners and they are required to accept it unquestioned is considered a difficulty<sup>44</sup>.

The corrective is to make learners the subjects of their own learning. The educator's role is to assist learners to move from object to subject position in their own learning and their own lives. This process is most recognisable in the work of Paulo Freire who, carrying out adult literacy work with the working class in Latin America, created pedagogy that:

*Enables the learners to reflect on the codified versions of their 'reality' (their own world of action) in a process of praxis. The codification serves its purpose in distancing the learners from their world of action so that, through reflection, the educatees begin to see it in a different, more critical light. It is the process whereby one is allowed to move beyond the popular, everyday (basist) knowledge, the 'knowledge of living experience' (common sense) to 'the knowledge emerging from the more rigorous approach to knowable objects.'<sup>45</sup>*

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43 Mayo, P. (2000). "Synthesising Gramsci and Freire: possibilities for a Theory of Transformative Adult Education." In Steiner, F. et al (eds). *Freirean Pedagogy, Praxis, and Possibilities*. Falmer Press: UK. 249-277.

44 Baker, J. et al. (2004). *Equality from Theory to Action*. Palgrave Macmillan: UK

45 Ibid. 265 incorporating Freire. P (1994). *Pedagogy of Hope: reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Continuum International Publishing Group: USA.

## 5 CRITICAL REFLECTION

Put simply this process is about facilitating learners to question their daily experience and to relate those themes to the social relations and conditions that structure them. This praxis is carried out through experiential learning, further explored in Chapter 6. The ultimate goal is to, "more fully understand the ways in which we might improve society."<sup>46</sup> It is also about developing what Mezirow has called social cognition or the sense that "who we are and what we know is shaped by one's social location."<sup>47</sup>

Currently, much critical adult education literature is concerned with the ways in which capitalism has become the dominant logic for governing the world. This logic privileges the world of work over democracy and the creation of equality. It reduces adult learners to consumers and adult education to another adaptation of schooling privileging the pour-in model of learning. Critical adult and community education counters this logic by encouraging learners to question it, but also assert that, that questioning is a key skill enabling individuals to participate in decision-making processes for ensure a democratic society<sup>48</sup>.

The business of fostering critical reflection is also known as consciousness-raising a term well known in women's community education where women are facilitated to look at how women's secondary status has impacted on their own lives<sup>49</sup>.

In order to build skills for critical reflection facilitators of critical adult and community education carry out the following in the learning environment:

- Increasing the awareness of a need for change in the world by exploring individual emotions about oppression and fostering empathy.
- Helping members of dominant groups in learning settings to understand their power and privilege. Again, the development of empathy for those who experience discrimination is important and seems to work better for this task in Western contexts than making an argument for the redistribution of material resources<sup>50</sup>.

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46 Callahan, J. (2004). "Breaking the Cult of Rationality: mindful Awareness of Emotion in the Critical Theory Classroom." In *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*. 102. 77.

47 Brookfield, S. and J.D. Holst. (2011). *Radicalising Adult Learning: adult Education for a just World*." Jossey-Bass: USA.

48 Heaney, T. (1996). "Adult Education for Social Change: from Centre Stage to the Wings and Back Again." An ERIC Monograph. (ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education) ; no. 365.

49 Connolly, B. (2001). "Women's Community Education in Ireland." AONTAS: Dublin.

50 Choules, K. (2007). "SOCIAL CHANGE EDUCATION: CONTEXT MATTERS." *Adult Education Quarterly*. 57(2):159-176.

## 5 CRITICAL REFLECTION

- Actively managing the emotions that come up through critical reflection by offering strategies to address oppression or distancing the learner through imagination exercises<sup>51</sup>.
- Using methods like connecting the local to the global, uncovering stereotypes, and relating every day experience back to a series of principles that govern those experiences, facilitating learners to view problems from a variety of different perspectives and developing solutions to them collaboratively.
- Ensuring that learning is dialogical and that the learning environment is democratised – that all voices are treated equally, an idea explored further in Chapter 6<sup>52</sup>.
- Presenting alternative options for systems and structures in society.
- Exploring, “how people learn racism, homophobia, patriarchy, and ableism and how they incorporate these ideologies into the microdecisions of their daily actions.”<sup>53</sup>

### Findings from DES Research

The previous research carried out on DES funded community education referred to throughout this report tracked the extent to which learners experienced the elements of critical reflection learning and the outcomes they experienced as a result. Key findings were:

- In the learning setting 49% of learners said that their facilitator/ tutor talked to them about how to make changes in their community and beyond, 61% indicated they were facilitated to understand the effects of society on their personal experiences, 52% said they were helped to understand inequality and 74% describe facilitators/ tutors that let them talk about their local area and its problems.
- Thirty-five percent of learners surveyed indicated that they joined community education to improve their understanding of another culture while 23% said they wanted to understand their experience as a member of a disadvantaged group.

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51 Callahan, J. (2004). “Breaking the Cult of Rationality: mindful Awareness of Emotion in the Critical Theory Classroom.” In *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*. 102. 77.

52 Choules, K. (2007). “SOCIAL CHANGE EDUCATION: CONTEXT MATTERS.” *Adult Education Quarterly*. 57(2):159-176.

53 Brookfield, S. and J.D. Holst. (2011). *Radicalising Adult Learning: adult Education for a just World.* Jossey-Bass: USA.

## 5 CRITICAL REFLECTION

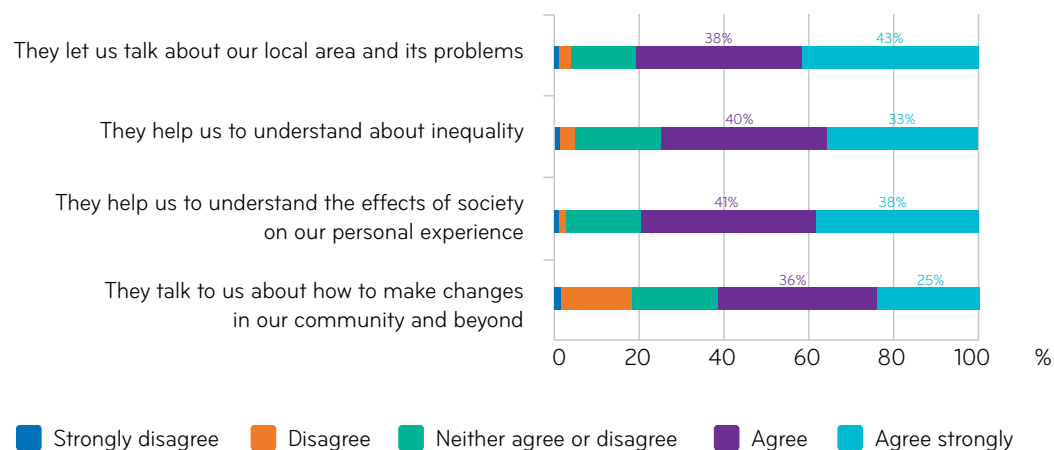
- The vast majority of providers said that increased levels of trust and tolerance were important or very important outcomes for learners and 60% said that critical media interpretation was important or very important.
- Relatively high rates of positive change in relation to a range of skills for critical reflection and low frequencies of individuals experiencing outcomes specifically related to the development of critical reflection like critical media interpretation.
- The features of community education that ensure the development of critical reflection could be strengthened.

## RELEVANT RESULTS SOCIAL ACTION MODEL RESEARCH

### Encouraging Critical Reflection in the Learning Environment

Learners were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with statements about their tutor/ facilitator that were related to aspects of the learning process that facilitate critical reflection. Their responses are set out in the figure below.

**Figure 5.1 Percentage Tutor Approach Fostering Critical Reflection**



## 5 CRITICAL REFLECTION

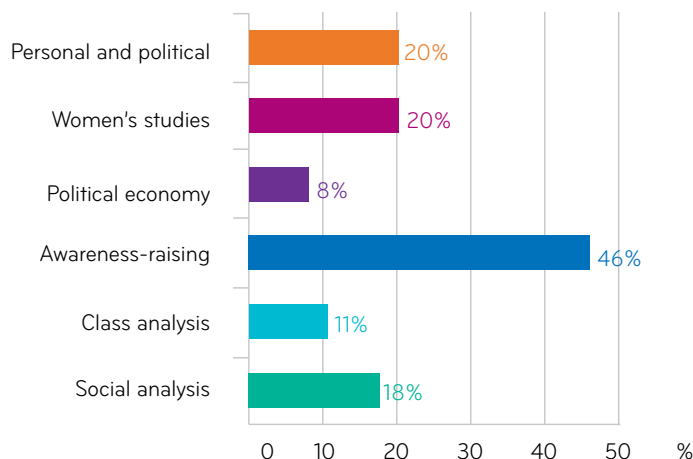
As we can see from the figure above learners were likely to agree or agree strongly to all the statements above. The statement they were least like to agree with was “they talk to us about how to make changes in our community and beyond” (61%).

The majority of providers surveyed agreed that it was important or very important to increase learners' levels of trust in others and to increase their levels of tolerance of other groups or points of view. Seventy-four percent said that critical media interpretation was an important or very important outcome for community education.

Some of the reasons for participation tracked through the survey related to a desire to develop critical reflection skills. Fifty-three percent of the 217 learners who answered this question described wanting to become involved in community education so that they could improve their understanding of another culture, while 38% of the 197 learners who answered the question indicated that they wanted to understand and explore their experience as a member of a disadvantaged group in Irish society.

Learners were also asked to select whether or not a range of critical reflection adjectives described their experience of learning in their group. The table below shows that learners did not frequently use adjectives related to critical thinking to describe community education.

**Figure 5.2 Percentage Critical Reflection Adjectives to Describe Community Education**



## 5 CRITICAL REFLECTION

The adjective most frequently chosen that related to critical thinking was awareness-raising (46%). The adjectives least frequently chosen were class analysis (11%) and social analysis (18%).

### Outcomes Related to Critical Reflection

Table 5.1 shows the rates of learners indicating that they had experienced positive change in relation to the development of a range of skills for critical reflection.

**Table 5.1 Percentage Critical Reflection Skills Outcomes**

Outcome	Some positive change	Large positive change	Total Social Action Model Research	Total DES Research
More accepting and understanding of other cultures	31	40	71	60
More accepting and understanding of beliefs different to my own	32	41	73	64
More sympathy for people I would have normally judged badly	30	31	61	59
Greater trust in service providers	32	21	53	49
Understanding global impact of local actions	31	21	52	53
Being critical of discrimination against disadvantaged groups	33	18	51	40
Greater understanding of how the Government works	26	16	42	29
Trust in the political system	10	1	11	11

## 5 CRITICAL REFLECTION

Over 50% of learners indicated positive change for the majority of critical reflection skills tracked. The top critical reflection outcomes experienced by learners were becoming more accepting and understanding of other cultures (71%), becoming more accepting and understanding of beliefs different to my own (73%) and gaining more sympathy for people normally judged badly (61%). The outcomes achieved least frequently were trust in the political system (11%), and a greater understanding of how government works (42%).

There is a tendency for those learners attending the centres participating in this research to achieve the outcomes with higher frequency than the cohort in the DES research. Of note, was that there is a much higher frequency of learners experiencing positive change in understanding how the government works (42%). Also of note is that only 51% of learners said that community education had facilitated positive change in relation to being critical of discrimination against disadvantaged groups.

Table 5.2 shows that around a third of learners in the social action model research sample began to engage in critical media interpretation as a result of community education, with using the internet being the most frequently named outcome (42%), followed by watching more educational programmes on TV (32%) and beginning to read more books (31%). Those from rural areas and those with less than lower secondary education were more likely to indicate having experienced this outcome.

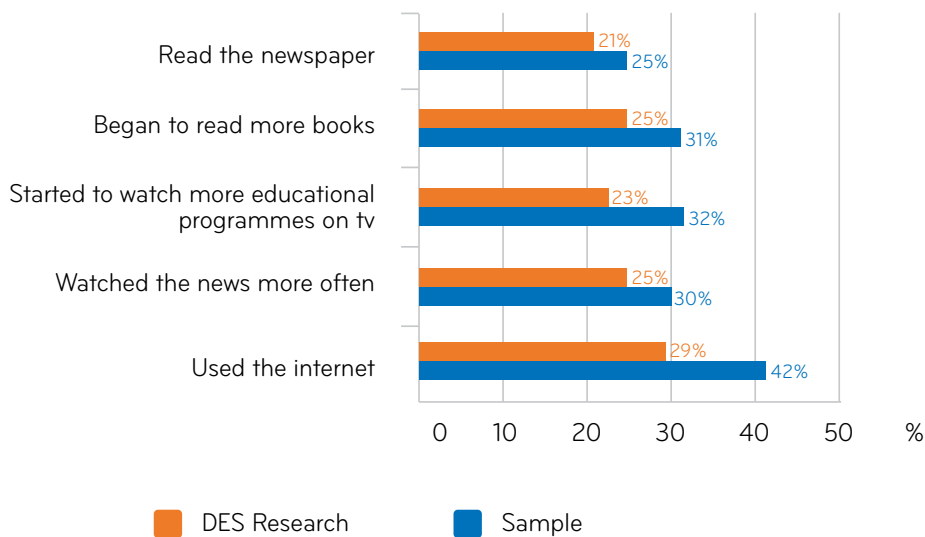
**Table 5.2 Percentage Critical Media Engagement Outcomes**

<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Yes I did this and I feel it is as a result of community education</b>	<b>Yes I did this but not as a result of community education</b>	<b>Yes, I did this but I have always done it</b>	<b>No, I did not do this</b>
<b>Used the internet</b>	42	9	39	10
<b>Started to watch more educational programmes on tv</b>	32	6	35	27
<b>Began to read more books</b>	31	7	39	23
<b>Watched the news more often</b>	30	11	39	20
<b>Read the newspaper</b>	25	7	57	10

## 5 CRITICAL REFLECTION

When we compare these figures to the DES research in the table below we can see that this cohort experienced these outcomes slightly more frequently than the learners in ALCES provision. In general, the achievement of critical media interpretation outcomes was low in this research sample. However, if we look at the rates of people already carrying out these activities we can see that the community education experience did result in converting those people not engaging with the media to beginning to do so.

**Figure 5.3 Comparison DES Sample to Social Action Model Research Sample Critical Reflection Outcomes**



### ANALYSIS

The findings show that the participating centres ensure tutor approaches that allow for the development of critical reflection skills. However, there is room for improvement in terms of tutors/ facilitators talking to learners about how to make changes in their communities and beyond.

Learners were not likely to use adjectives, which described content and processes that facilitate critical reflection. Perhaps this is because many of them described specific academic subjects that learners had not taken part in during their community education experience.

The research sample did experience high rates of positive change in relation to the development of trust and tolerance in relation to other beliefs and cultures, as well as sympathy for others they might have judged badly.

However, lower rates experienced key critical reflection outcomes such as understanding the global impact of local actions, being critical of discrimination and understanding how the government works. The low rate of learners experiencing positive change in trust in the political system could, actually, be an indication that they had developed critical reflection skills that allowed them to critique the political system and this reflection caused negative change in their levels of trust.

In general rates of outcomes related to critical media interpretation appear to be low, but when we look more closely we can see that community education was quite successful in engaging those not previously engaged with the media to do so. In general this sample experienced all of the outcomes measured more frequently than in the DES research.

### DISCUSSION

The literature asserts that the foundation of a learning environment that promotes critical reflection is one that does not use a banking model of education and that encourages the development of social cognition. We can see that the participating centres encourage tutor approaches that meet these aims, evidenced in particular by the way in which learners agreed to statements about learning to understand inequality and the effects of society on their personal experience.

## 5 CRITICAL REFLECTION

A key theme emerging from these results is that learners attending the centres in this research experienced an increase in the awareness of others that results in increased understanding and sympathy. From the last chapter we know that an affective dimension to the learning encourages these outcomes and is the foundation for the development of critical reflection and becoming involved in social action.

The application of critical reflection to media is one way of embedding this process in our day-to-day lives and this work could potentially increase engagement with those media. In this sample we can see that many learners who formerly may not have been engaging with media did start to do so.

Subjects that encourage an explicit critique of the systems and structures of society are ones that were expressed as adjectives that learners could choose from to describe their experience of learning, such as class analysis and women's studies. Rates of choosing them to describe learning were low. We do not know if learners were engaged in these processes, or if they were and the subjects were not named as such with them.

However, it would appear, even if they were not named as such, that only about half of learners in this sample were engaged in an explicit critique of discrimination and oppressive ideologies like racism, or presented with an analysis of how society works and alternatives for it. This conclusion is borne out by the fact that half or less explored the global impact of local action, increased their understanding of how the government works and became critical of discrimination against other groups. The literature asserts that these tasks are important to the development of critical thinking. Providers may wish to ask if they would like to strengthen these explicit critiques in their work as in the chapter on community development and social action it will be seen that these skills are crucial for learners engaging in social change.

# 6

# EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

This chapter sets out the results of the learners' and organisational survey relating to the creation and outcomes of an experiential learning environment. The background describes the levels at which this feature of community education occurs.

## BACKGROUND

Experiential learning is the foundation of the model of community education explored here. It is the feature, which allows for the other features to be implemented. The notion of using people's experiences to structure learning happens at the individual, the group and the community levels in community education.

At the community level experiential learning is about the community owning the provision the centre usually starts as an organic response, "organising to work and meet its own needs."<sup>54</sup> It is a response to local issues, through the programmes offered. Lovett asserts that responsiveness to the community should not stop at the selection of programmes, but should be firmly linked to community action, an idea explored in more detail in the next chapter<sup>55</sup>.

At the level of the group, experiential learning is first about the co-creation of content, with the ultimate control over selection residing with the group. Many adult and community educators have problematised this notion within the context of radical adult education. They assert that facilitators/ tutors must play an active role in presenting what content is possible as opposed to passively responding to felt needs of a group. Otherwise, community education's contribution to the creation of democracy is stunted, "learners can only make decisions if they know the full range of options open to them, otherwise the dominant ideology is reproduced."<sup>56</sup>

This situation arises because people's wants and needs have been constructed by the context we live in, which has seen a shift from humanism and behaviourism to a "view of progress based on confidence in the operating of social and economic principles and in technology."<sup>57</sup> Therefore, learners become primarily interested in learning that supports this worldview. As early as 1983, Lovett asserted a cautionary message about the notions of choice and relevance

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54 Connolly, B. (2001). "Women's Community Education in Ireland." AONTAS: Dublin.

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

56 Brookfield, S. and J.D. Holst. (2011). *Radicalising Adult Learning: adult Education for a just World.* Jossey-Bass: USA. 109.

57 Heaney. T. (1996). "Adult Education for Social Change: from Centre Stage to the Wings and Back Again." An ERIC Monograph. (ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education) ; no. 365.

## 6 EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

in community education saying that, "consumer demand is not the same as democracy."<sup>58</sup> In the move to an instrumental focus on adult learning, institutional goals have taken priority.

The job of the facilitator/ tutor is to agitate for alternative content that can contribute to the implementation of the other features of the model of community education presented in this research and to encourage learners to engage "with troubling ideas."<sup>59</sup> This task might mean promoting more academic subjects to learners, like history or women's studies, which could help learners to gain the analysis and skills needed to engage with social movements and critique the status quo. Sometimes, this might mean temporarily stepping away from non-formal methodologies. Even Freire considered that traditional subjects and teaching methods could be appropriate to adult learning for social change.<sup>60</sup> However, as already stated the final decision resides with learners.

Experiential learning at the group level is also concerned with method. The DES research presented a clear picture of this process, encouraging what Connolly describes as the group becoming a resource for learning or a collaborative environment. Learning is made relevant to learners' everyday experience, there is lots of discussion and dialogue and all voices in the room are equal, including that of the facilitator/ tutor. This openness of the learning environment ensures that people's voices are heard and valued, which encourages inclusion and positive regard. According to Brookfield it is essential to the development of critical reflection because it allows learners to see issues from a variety of perspectives and assists with the extension of meaning frameworks.<sup>61</sup>

This control over content and process is essential to the development of agency. Many authors put forward that learners cannot act in the wider world unless they distinguish having power and control within the learning setting.

As has been previously noted in the chapter on social recognition, at the individual level learner needs and barriers are addressed within the learning setting in order to ensure access, persistence and retention. The valuing of an individual's opinions and ideas also helps to develop self-worth.

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58 *ibid.*

59 Brookfield, S. and J.D. Holst. (2011). *Radicalising Adult Learning: adult Education for a just World.* Jossey-Bass: USA. 109.

60 Mayo, P. (2000). "Synthesising Gramsci and Freire: possibilities for a Theory of Transformative Adult Education." In Steiner, F. et al (eds). *Freirean Pedagogy, Praxis, and Possibilities.* Falmer Press: UK. 249-277.

61 Brookfield, S. and J.D. Holst. (2011). *Radicalising Adult Learning: adult Education for a just World.* Jossey-Bass: USA. 109.

Experiential learning also assists community education to help learners identify their skills and strengths in order to devise progression options, and to become “agents of their own learning.”<sup>62</sup> In the tradition of women’s community education, this work often resulted in participants becoming community leaders. Ultimately, this self-directed learning is perceived as a political act within radical adult learning as it reassigns power and control to those who are most marginalised.

### Findings from the DES Research

The DES research confirmed the importance of experiential learning in community education:

- The openness of the learning environment, “the overall atmosphere of the group” was the aspect of community education most frequently chosen as the one that was most important in facilitating all of the outcomes measured, supporting experiential learning’s role in the development of agency.
- The majority of learners surveyed agreed or agreed strongly to statements relating to facilitators/ tutors promoting experiential learning through valuing life experiences and stories, treating them as equals, using creative methods, encouraging lots of discussion, and working with them to plan what they are going to do in the course. Just over half said that facilitators/ tutors let them go off course if they are really interested in something while just under half indicated that they only stick to the planned content of the course.
- Qualitative feedback indicated the importance of facilitators/ tutors modelling respect, equality and empathy in the learning environment.
- The main type of learning offered, and assumed desired by learners, in ALCES funded community education was arts/ hobby learning, followed by exercise and performing arts.
- The key progression outcomes identified by learners were to learn a new skill (70%), do a non-certified course with their current group (55%) and do a certified course with their current group (52%).
- VEC personnel felt that progression to further education and training was an important outcome of community education (64%), but were undecided about labour market progression.

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62 Connolly, B. (2001). “Women’s Community Education in Ireland.” AONTAS: Dublin. 7.

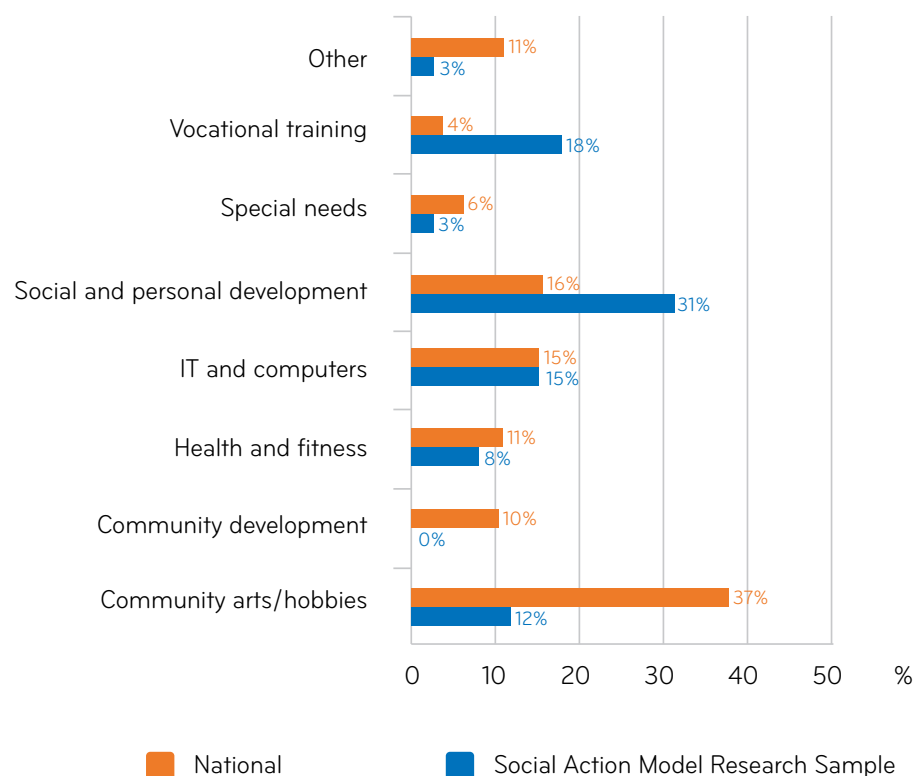
## RELEVANT RESULTS SOCIAL ACTION MODEL RESEARCH

This section presents survey results about how providers provide community education that is structured using learners' experience.

### Responding to Learner Needs

All of the centres participating in the research said that they carried out consultations with learners and local needs analyses to inform the development and delivery of programmes on offer. This work results in the profile of courses that the centres offer, which was tracked through this research. The profile of learning offered in the centres is set out in the figure below and is compared to the national profile for ALCES funded community education for 2009.

**Figure 6.1 Percentage Type of Course<sup>63</sup>**



<sup>63</sup> Please note community development is not included as a type of course in the national statistics, but was employed for this research.

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The above figure shows that the predominant type of learning is social and personal development (31%), followed by vocational learning (18%) and IT learning (15%). This profile differs significantly to the national where arts and hobby courses were the predominant type of course. The vast majority of vocational training courses being provided are FETAC accredited.

Relevant to the experiential learning feature of community education are a range of the self-defined motivations for participating in community education. For this cohort progression appears to be important. The table below shows that the top three reasons were to make friends and have social contact (87%), to move onto further study (77%), to have fun (77%), and to get a qualification (73%). Notable is that 70% of learners wanted to improve their employment prospects. These differ to the DES research where low rates of learners wanted to become involved for progression reasons, although social contact was the main reason in the ALCES cohort as well.

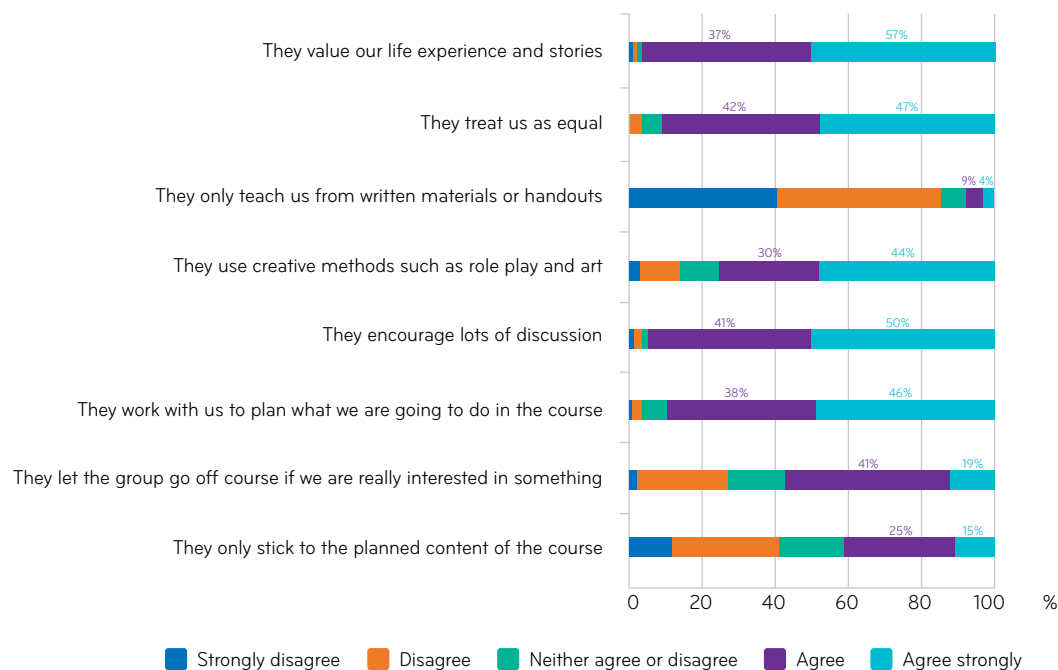
**Table 6.1 Percentage Reasons for Participating**

	Yes I was interested in this and I have achieved this goal	Yes I was interested in this but I have not achieved this goal yet	Total Yes	No this was never a reason I wanted to take part
<b>To make friends and have social contact (n=254)</b>	82	5	87	13
<b>To help me move on to further study (n=226)</b>	51	26	77	23
<b>To have fun (n=237)</b>	73	4	77	23
<b>To get a qualification (n=220)</b>	57	16	73	27
<b>To improve my employment prospects and help me get a job (n=220)</b>	45	25	70	30
<b>To study a particular topic (n=205)</b>	41	14	55	40
<b>To improve my reading/ writing skills (n=215)</b>	37	8	45	54
<b>Because I was told I had to do it (n=192)</b>	4	1	5	95

## 6 EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

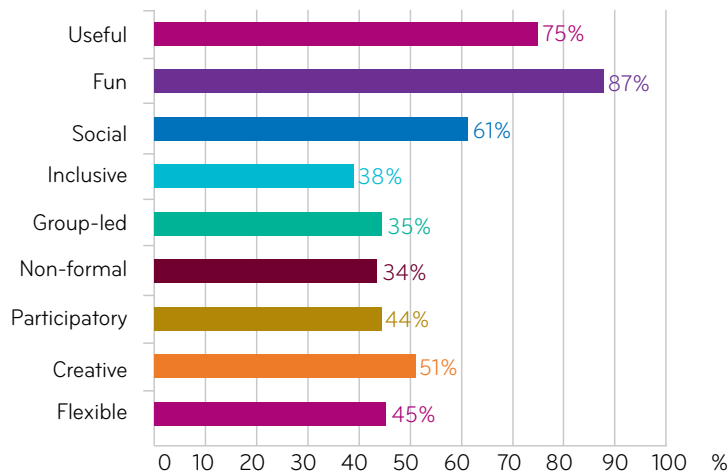
Learners were asked the extent to which they agreed to a range of statements which demonstrate the tutor/ facilitators responsiveness to learner needs and making learning relevant to experience. The results are set out in the figure below.

**Figure 6.2 Tutor Approaches Experiential Learning**



The figure shows that tutors/ facilitators used approaches that facilitate experiential learning. Of note is that only 60% said that the tutor/ facilitator let them go off course if they were really interested in something, that is, change direction from planned learning if that is what the group wanted. Low rates of learners said that the tutor/ facilitator stuck to the planned content of the course or only used written materials or handouts.

The figure below presents the extent to which learners indicated that a series of adjectives about experiential learning described their experience of their group.

**Figure 6.3 Experiential Learning Adjectives**

We can see that the adjectives most often used were fun (87%), useful (75%) and social (61%), closely followed by creative (51%), showing that the learning was enjoyable and relevant for learners. Less likely to be used were adjectives that described the specific methods and approaches that tutors/ facilitators can use to ensure experiential and collaborative learning in a group.

## Outcomes Related to Experiential Learning

### **Social Cohesion**

Learners indicated whether or not they had experienced positive change in terms of a range of outcomes related to social cohesion<sup>64</sup>, which experiential learning supports. The results are set out in the table below.

<sup>64</sup> Understood here as the development of strong and positive relationships between people and seen as an outcome of a learning environment where learners are able to share their life experience discovering common problems and solutions.

**Table 6.2 Social Cohesion Outcomes**

	Some positive change	Large positive change	Total Social Action Model Research	Total DES Research
Talking to new people	31	62	93	89
More contact with friends	27	35	62	69
How willing I am to help my neighbours	29	19	48	49
More contact with family	20	26	46	43
How well I get along with my neighbours	28	15	43	44
Trust in people in my neighbourhood	26	11	37	45

The table shows that the outcomes where learners most frequently experienced positive change were talking to new people (93%), more contact with friends (62%) and willingness to help neighbours (48%).

The aspect encouraging the type of outcomes in the table above that was chosen most frequently by learners was the overall atmosphere in the group (28%).

### ***Progression Concepts and Outcomes***

Self-directed learning is facilitated by the experiential feature of community education so the data collected in the surveys relevant to progression is reviewed here.

Thirty-eight percent of learners indicated that they had completed no courses in community education and 25% said they had completed four or more. The majority of learners (74%) said they were currently involved in one course.

Fifty-nine percent of providers said labour market progression was important or very important for learners, while 85% said the same of further education. However, only 25% of providers indicated that community education was about bridging learners from non-formal to formal educational opportunities with the ultimate goal of accessing the labour market.

Learners were asked to pick from a series of statements the one which described their experience of community education. Each of these related to three concepts of progression defined by the literature. The results are in the table below.

**Table 6.3 Percentage Description of Community Education**

Statement	Percentage
It is like a ladder, where at each run I feel supported and safe enough to move up to the next rung and get closer to my goals (progression as linear)	35
It is like a journey, where sometimes you take breaks or change direction but where each part of the trip teaches you something new (progression as development which stops and starts and involvements horizontal and diagonal movement)	33
It is a space for me to go, where I can connect with others and look after myself (progression as maintenance of well-being)	32

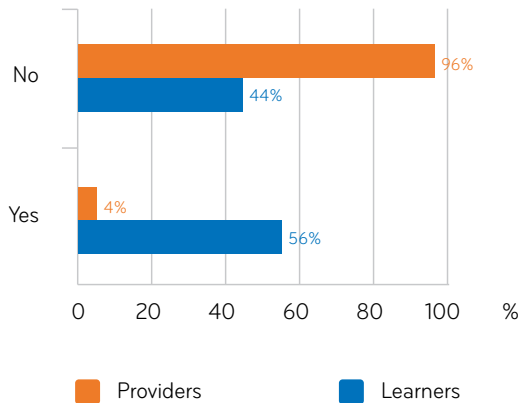
The above table shows that learners employed the three concepts of progression tracked equally as each of the concepts was chosen by around a third of learners. Therefore, progression is learner-defined and is about what kind of learner journey they desire, as opposed to an externally imposed concept.

Forty-two percent of learners were engaged in working towards some level of FETAC accreditation. The level most frequently named was Level 5 (39%) closely followed by Level 3 (33%). Only eight percent were working to achieve accreditation at higher levels than that.

Both providers and learners were asked whether or not a learner should receive accreditation from an awarding body every time they complete a course in community education. Eighty-five percent of providers agreed or strongly agreed that non-accredited learning in community education is essential while 11% said the same to the statement accreditation is essential. As the figure below shows more than half of learners (56%) said yes to this statement compared to four percent of participating centres.

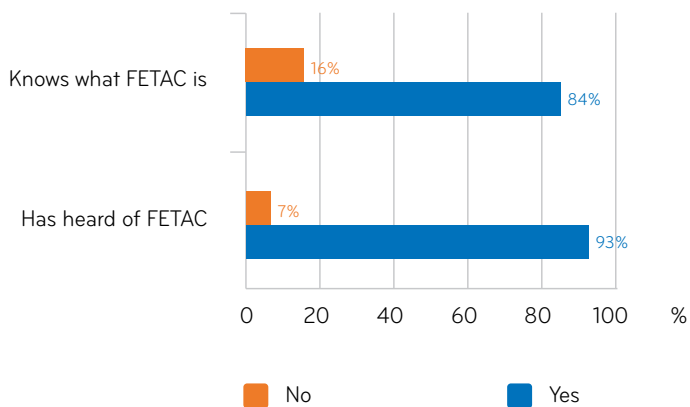
## 6 EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

**Figure 6.4 Accreditation for Community Education**



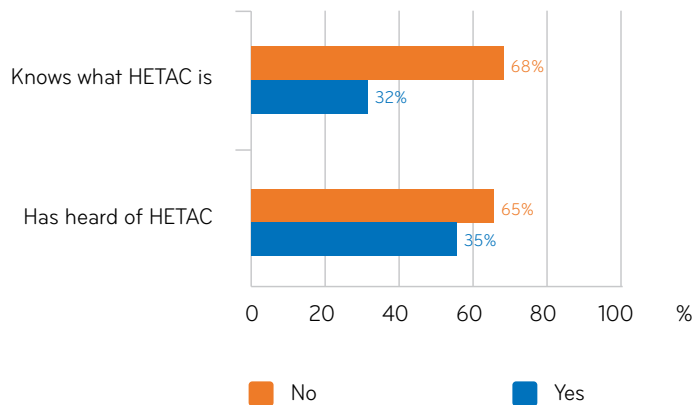
In order to assess learners' awareness of progression routes they were asked a series of questions about their knowledge of FETAC, HETAC and the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). The results are available in the three tables below.

**Figure 6.5 Percentage Knowledge and Awareness of FETAC**

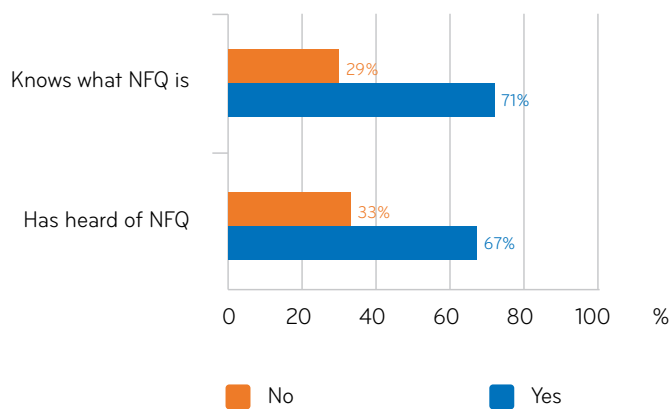


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**Figure 6.6 Percentage Knowledge and Awareness of HETAC**



**Figure 6.7 Percentage Knowledge and Awareness of NFQ**



The above figures show that learners' knowledge and awareness of FETAC and the NFQ are generally high, but their knowledge and awareness of HETAC is low since only 35% had heard of HETAC and of that proportion on 32% knows what it is.

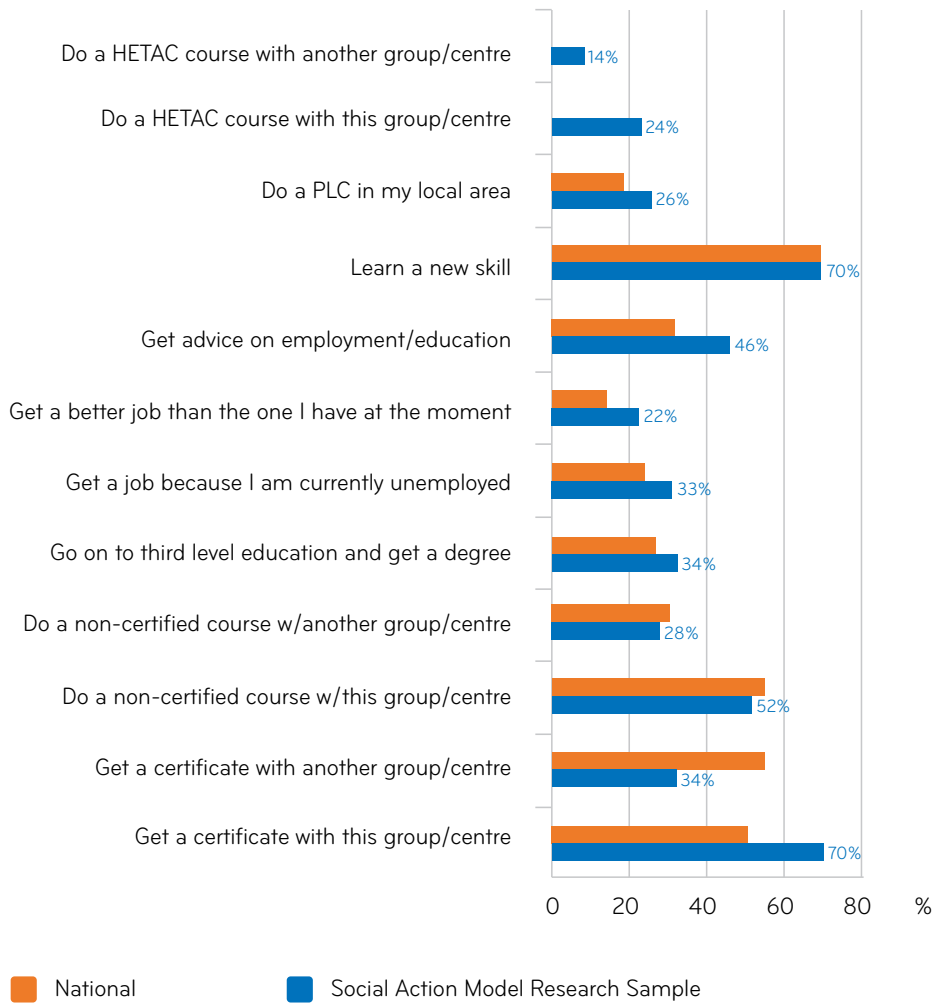
Finally learners were asked if a series of progression goals had become important to them as a result of community education. The results are shown in the table below.

Table 6.8 Progression Outcomes

	Yes, I want to do this and think that this group can help me to do it	Yes, I want to do this, but do not think this group can help me to do it	I have already done this as a result of coming to this group	No, I have no interest in doing this/ not relevant
Get a certificate with this group/ centre (n=264)	61	3	15	21
Get a certificate with another group/ centre (n=244)	31	8	8	53
Do a non-certified course w/ this group/ centre (n=239)	53	5	9	33
Do a non-certified course w/ another group/ centre (n=172)	27	2	8	63
Go on to third level education and get a degree (n=243)	36	10	3	51
Get a job because I am currently unemployed (n=242)	35	8	3	54
Get a better job than the one I have at the moment (n=231)	25	7	2	66
Get advice on employment/ education (n=239)	48	5	7	40
Learn a new skill (n=255)	71	7	7	15
Do a PLC in my local area (n=241)	30	4	2	64
Do a HETAC course with this group/ centre (n=234)	28	6	2	64
Do a HETAC course with another group/ centre (227)	17	5	1	77
Trust in people in my neighbourhood	26	11	37	45

The figure below shows the results from the table above when the 'yes' responses for the current provider are shown as a percentage of the 285 learners who completed the survey compared to the same in the DES research.

**Figure 6.8 Percentage Progression Outcomes Total Social Action Model Research Sample and DES Research<sup>65</sup>**



<sup>65</sup> Please note the HETAC goals referred to were not asked about in the DES research.

## 6 EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

We can see that the top three outcomes for learners in this research were to get a certificate with this group/ centre (70%), learn a new skill (70%) and do a non-certified course with this group or centre (52%). These outcomes are closely followed by the desire of learners to get advice on employment/ education (46%). Learners were less likely to indicate that they wanted to achieve very specific progression options such as getting a job because I am currently unemployed (33%), or moving into courses with other types of providers such as a PLC (26%), or doing a HETAC course with another group or centre (14%).

In general, learners in this research indicated more frequently that they want to achieve the personal goals asked about than in the DES research, except in the case of learning a new skill and doing a non-certified course with their current provider.

The top most important aspect of community education that helped learners in relation to personal development goals was the way the facilitator/ tutor treated people taking part in the course (33%).

### ANALYSIS

The results show that providers are effective at ensuring learning environments where experiential learning can take place characterised by tutor approaches that allow people to use their life experience and negotiate content for learning that is described as fun, social, useful and creative.

The top types of course provision in this research were social and personal development and vocational learning. These types of programmes are consistent with the learners' top motivations for becoming involved in community education, which were to improve self-confidence (see Chapter 3) and to gain qualifications and improve employment prospects. These findings show that providers are responsive to learners needs.

It is of note that bridging to the labour market and accreditation is far more important to learners than providers. For instance 56% of learners thought that learners should receive accreditation from an awarding body every time they do a course while only four percent of providers agreed with this statement.

Most learners had completed more than one course with their provider. Combine this finding with the fact that 70% of learners said they wanted to get a certificate with their group or centre and we might assume that learners generally like to move to progression options within their provider.

## 6 EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Progression was learner-defined and not seen purely as upward progression along one dimension of learning. Learners had a reasonably high knowledge of FETAC and the NFQ, but low knowledge of HETAC.

The centres in this research provide community education that motivates progression to further education and training, particularly in terms of certified and non-certified learning with the provider, learning a new skill and seeking progression guidance. The low levels of learners wanting to move into specific progression opportunities outside the centre or to post-secondary education such as their local PLC or a HETAC course could be for two reasons. First, learners may feel that the education available in their provider is all that they need to achieve their goals. Second, their awareness of progression options beyond FETAC and in their local areas is low. The second reason is supported by the low awareness and knowledge of HETAC by the research sample.

### Discussion

The results show that providers are strong in implementing the facets of experiential learning explored in the literature. They are giving learners what they want and this is evidenced by the ways in which there is a correlation between learner motivations and course type. We can see as well in the results about tutor/ facilitator approach that learners' life experience is being drawn on in the learning and they are being consulted about course content.

The predominant type of learning is social and personal development, which supports another important element of the social action model of community education, which is pre-development learning.

There are high numbers of learners desiring accreditation and progression. This finding shows how learners' wants and needs are being constructed by what the literature describes as a focus on instrumental learning. Providers are responding to this demand evidenced by the amount of accredited vocational learning being provided and the rate of learners engaged in FETAC accreditation, despite the low importance they place on bridging to the labour market and certified learning.

Since the role of educators is not simply to respond to consumer demand but to problematise it in the context of how this might be structured by society, this finding suggests that providers might wish to examine the extent to which they offer other types of programmes that are connected to the realisation of democracy. Obviously the

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decision of the learners is paramount, but they could benefit from the presentation, as the literature says, of a more varied range of options. In this context, the low provision of community development courses in the participating centres is notable.

The literature asserts that experiential learning in the form of ownership over content and the valuing of opinion fosters self-directed learning and agency. For the learners surveyed here, this work has resulted in many of them wanting to pursue further learning from their provider, learn new skills and obtain progression guidance.

It appears that learners know little about HETAC and that providers could potentially promote it to them so that they become further aware of how they could progress beyond FETAC if they chose to.

# 7

## COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL ACTION

This chapter focuses on the results of the learners' and organisational surveys about the achievement of civic engagement outcomes through community education and the inputs used to achieve them. It also explores providers' thinking about whether or not the purpose of community education is local and national change to address disadvantage.

### BACKGROUND

Any form of radical adult learning is concerned with social change and the model of community education explored here is no different. As Heaney says, "adult education is the learning component... of democratic development and social transformation." Traditionally, the premise for the social action model of community education was that learners themselves learned how to and carried out social action or community development activities as part of the process. AONTAS has described this as the advanced level of the process, saying:

*It can happen that as learners develop on a personal level, they leave behind the community setting and move freely into mainstream education or the workforce. The desire to bring about change and social justice may be weakened at this point. While personal development is a necessary step towards social and political development, there is no guarantee that one will follow the other. Nonetheless, Community Education providers still strive to achieve the goal of instigating social and political change<sup>66</sup>.*

Many authors point out that in order for adult and community education to achieve a social change purpose, provision must be connected to social movements or broader collectives of people seeking fundamental change. Again, women's community education provides an example of this connection<sup>67</sup>. A guide to best practice in women's community education shows how these organisations accomplish this aim by carrying out policy work and participating in local and national networks of women's groups working for women's equality. Individual women learners are facilitated to become involved in this work through the development of leadership skills encouraging their involvement in these arenas<sup>68</sup>. In other words, community education has the potential to mobilise learners for social movements.

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66 AONTAS. (2004). *Community Education 2004*. AONTAS: Dublin. 20.

67 Connolly, B. (2001). "Women's Community Education in Ireland." AONTAS: Dublin. 7.

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

In order to ensure a connection between radical adult learning and social change learning activities should be focused on combating oppression<sup>69</sup>. This focus is also crucial to social recognition, because the unequal distribution of material resources is put forward as the cause of the lack of social recognition for disadvantaged groups<sup>70</sup>. Recent research about community education found that at the level of provision community education providers respond to structural inequality by providing community education to disadvantaged target groups. However a traditional teacher/ student process in many groups challenged progression of learners to community participation<sup>71</sup>.

This purpose is also challenged by the predominant logic currently that adult education is purely there to make economies "become lean, mean and internationally competitive."<sup>72</sup> Thus, community education can be rendered instrumental learning situated within a community.

In order to promote the achievement of social change through community education and to encourage individual learners to act collectively and on their own for this purpose the following needs to happen in the learning environment:

- Participatory democracy should be modelled in the classroom, decision-making and authority should be shared. This process teaches about what democracy could be like as well as the skills needed to participate in it.
- There should also be learning about how current institutions and structures work, how they could be changed and what alternatives could look like<sup>73</sup>.
- As already reflected in the last chapter, the learning environment must be open. This aspect is particularly important for the achievement of civic engagement outcomes by learners.

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69 Mayo, P. (2000). "Synthesising Gramsci and Freire: possibilities for a Theory of Transformative Adult Education." In Steiner, F. et al (eds). *Freirean Pedagogy, Praxis, and Possibilities*. Falmer Press: UK. 249-277.

70 Hottunen, R. (2007). "Critical Adult Education and the Political-Philosophical Debate between Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth." In *Educational Theory*. 57(4).

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

72 Walters, S. et al. (2004). "Economics, politics and Adult Education." In Foley, G. (ed). *Dimensions of Adult Learning: adult Education and Training in a Global Era*. Open University Press: UK. 137-152.

73 This bullet and one above it taken from Brookfield, S. and J.D. Holst. (2011). *Radicalising Adult Learning: adult Education for a just World*." Jossey-Bass: USA.

## 7 COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL ACTION

- Generally the literature asserts that curriculum should be connected to the broader aims of the social movement it is linked to i.e. women's equality, combating poverty or global justice.
- The literature also puts forward that the facilitator/ tutor must assume a political role, being clear about their commitment to learning for social action, presenting the principles that match the aims of the movement and presenting potential content that will help to realise the above point. The decision to be explicit about this role is based on context. For instance, facilitators working with dominant groups might wait until closer to the end of a programme to voice their role so as not to alienate the learners<sup>74</sup>.

This work is in part carried out through the implementation of the features of experiential learning and critical thinking which help to develop the critical voice of learners in community education, or learners who can voice their opinions about the world around them and know that those opinions are valued<sup>75</sup>.

### Findings from DES Research

The following points from this research tell us about whether or not community education results in skills for community development and social change and learners taking action:

- The community education approaches that learners were least likely to experience were the ones related to community and social change. Instead learning was more likely to be related to the provision of learning opportunities in the community.
- Only half of learners agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that facilitators/ tutors helped them to plan for and address problems in their community.
- Qualitative feedback from case studies indicated that strongly managed centres provided links to civic engagement opportunities for learners and that this might increase the achievement of these outcomes in those centres
- Civic and political engagement outcomes were the ones that were the least frequently experienced by learners, with only about a third experiencing the top five, including

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74 Choules, K. (2007). "SOCIAL CHANGE EDUCATION: CONTEXT MATTERS." *Adult Education Quarterly*. 57(2):159-176.

75 McCardle, K. and S. Mansfield. (2007). "Voice, Discourse and Transformation: enabling Learning for the Achieving of Social Change." In *Discourse: studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*. 28(4). 485-498.

deciding to give something back to the community, volunteering, using the internet, beginning to read more books and watching the news more often (the last three are considered in the chapter on critical reflection).

- However, the achievement of outcomes related to community cohesion or community-mindedness was high.
- The research concluded that it would be important for those who provide community education or those who support it to decide the extent to which they would like to see civic engagement outcomes occur as a result of community education.

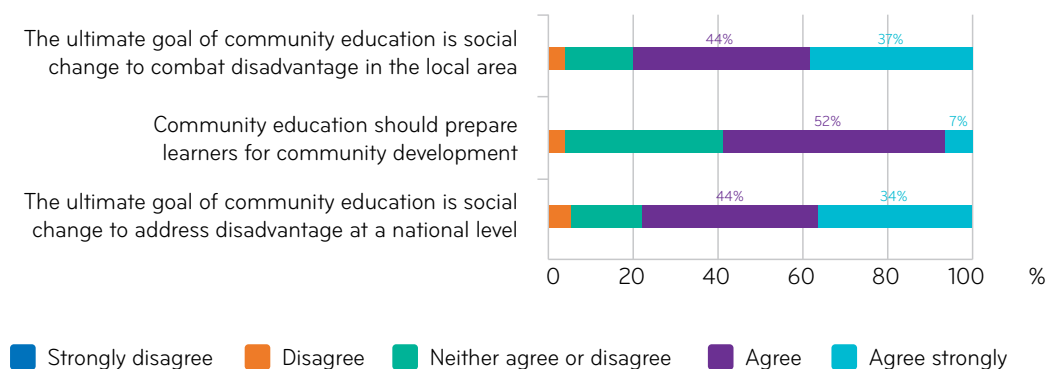
## RELEVANT RESULTS SOCIAL ACTION MODEL RESEARCH SAMPLE

This section reviews results from the learner's survey related to fostering social action and community development skills in the learning setting and the civic and political outcomes experienced by learners.

### Fostering Social Action in the Learning Setting

Providers were asked the extent to which they agreed to a set of statements about community education's role in social change and community development. The results are set out in the figure below.

**Figure 7.1 Percentage Provider Attitudes Social Action Purpose Community Education**



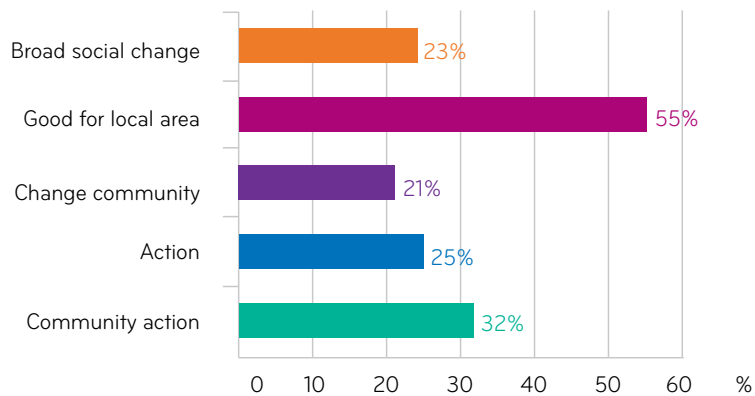
## 7 COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL ACTION

When asked about their perceived importance, 81% of providers saw increased participation in political activities as important or very important for learners, while 85% said the same for increased participation in civic activities.

When asked the extent to which their tutor/ facilitator helped them engage in social action, 59% of learners indicated that their tutor helped them to plan for and address problems in their community and beyond.

The figure below shows the extent to which learners selected adjectives that described their experience of community education related to community development social action.

**Figure 7.2 Community Development and Social Action Adjectives**



While over half of learners selected the adjective good for local area (55%), they did not frequently choose adjectives related to taking action and social change to describe community education.

All of the adjectives to describe the community education experience referred to throughout the report were clustered into categories representing the four models of community education referred to in the introduction to this research. Each model was given a mean score based on the extent to which learners experienced it. The results of this exercise for this research and the DES research are set out in the table below. Readers are reminded that the model of community education explored in this research is a hybrid of the last two models in the table.

**Table 7.1 Models of Community Education**

Model	Score Social Action Model Research Sample	Score DES Sample	Max. No of Points
Community Organisation – Liberal	3.39	3.03	6
Community Development – Liberal Reform	2.01	1.49	5
Community Action – Freirean Model for Local Change	2.9	1.91	9
Social Action – Working Class Action	2.2	1.42	9

The table above shows that the models learners described experiencing the least were the community action and social action models. However, learners in this sample described somewhat more frequently than in the DES research that they experienced these two models.

## Civic Engagement Outcomes

Relevant to the feature of community education explored in this chapter is the finding that 73% of the 225 learners who answered the question said they wanted to participate in community education in order to become more involved in the community.

The table below shows the civic engagement outcomes that learners said they did as a result of community education.

Table 7.2 Civic Engagement Outcomes

	Yes I did this and I feel it is as a result of community education	Yes I did this but not as a result of community education	Yes, I did this but I have always done it	No, I did not do this
Talked to friends or family about politics or social issues	36	8	38	18
Questioned a politician	31	4	24	41
Decided to give something back to the community	28	5	22	46
Recycled	27	10	57	5
Worked with other people in my group to take action about a local/ social issue	26	6	9	59
Registered to vote	25	8	52	15
Voted in local election	23	8	50	19
Went to a community consultation/ meeting	20	5	14	61
Donated to a charity	20	9	48	23
Volunteered in a community group	20	4	20	55
Voted in national election	19	6	51	24
Helped a neighbour	18	7	63	12
Took part in protest march	17	4	6	72
Voted in last referendum	17	6	50	27
Voted in EU election	15	5	48	32
Went to a community policing/ neighbourhood meeting	12	5	12	70
Went to a local TDs clinic	11	5	9	75
Went to a parent-teacher meeting	8	6	36	50
Volunteered for child's school	5	1	17	76
Joined my local residents'/ estate management committee	4	2	10	84

## 7 COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL ACTION

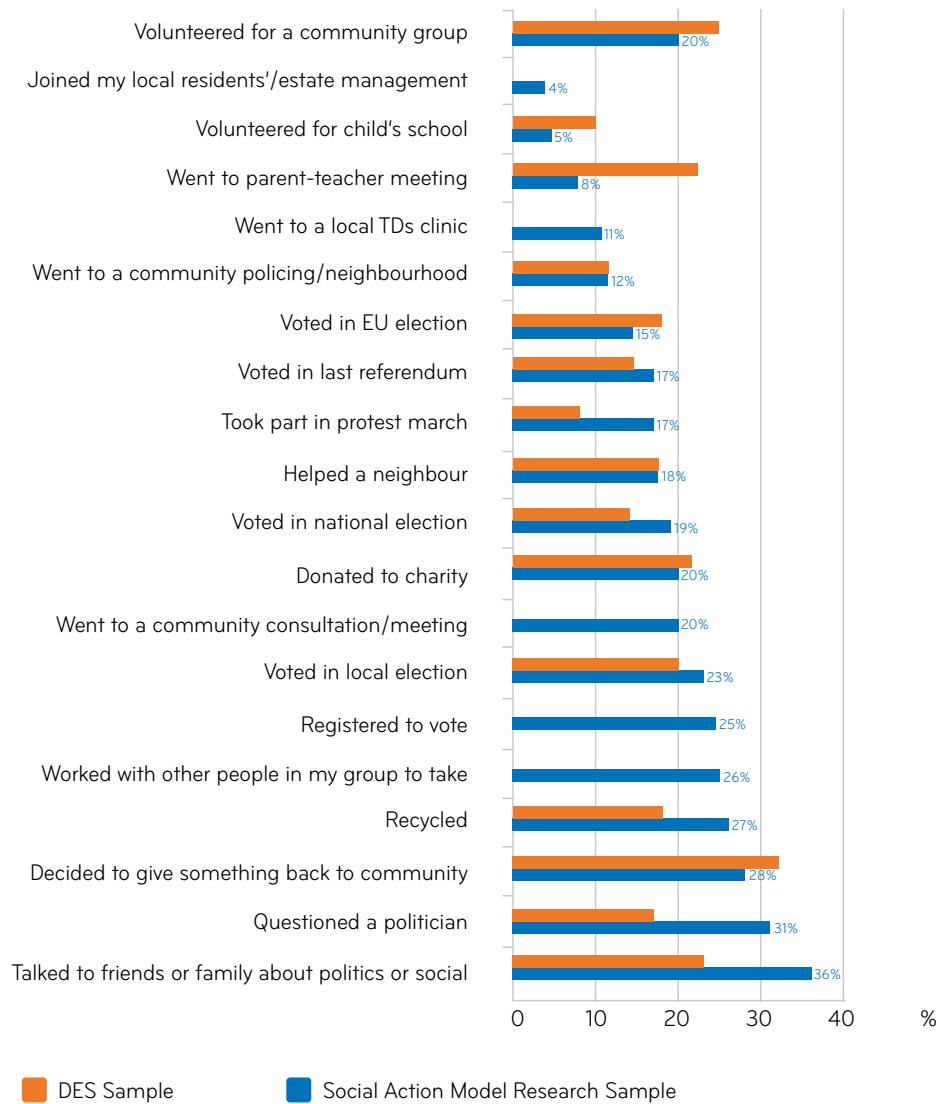
The top three outcomes were: talked to friends or family about politics or social issues (36%); questioned a politician (31%), and decided to give something back to the community (28%).

While civic engagement outcomes appear to happen less frequently than other type of outcomes tracked through this research we can see that there are a few outcomes that many learners indicated they had always done, but where quite a proportion of the learners who were not already doing the outcome began to as a result of community education. These include talking to friends or family about politics or social issues, registering to vote, voting in different elections and donating to a charity.

Those with less than lower secondary education and those from rural areas were significantly more likely to indicate that they had questioned a politician as a result of community education.

The figure below compares the frequencies for the civic engagement outcomes against those from the DES research.

**Figure 7.3 Comparison Social Action Model Research Sample to DES Sample<sup>76</sup>**



<sup>76</sup> The items that give no figures for the DES sample relate to items that were added to the survey for this piece of research: joined my local residents'/ estate management committee; went to a local TDs clinic; went to a community consultation/ meeting; registered to vote, and worked with other people in my group to take action on a local/ social issue.

In the DES research learners indicated more frequently than in this sample that community education resulted in them volunteering for a community group, going to a parent-teacher meeting, volunteering for a child's school, voting in an EU election, and deciding to give something back to the community. Learners in this sample experienced the other outcomes somewhat more frequently. These rates are notable in the case of recycling, questioning a politician and talking to friends or family about a political or social issue.

Learners were asked to indicate whether or not community education had made them more likely to become involved in a series of indicators related to community cohesion and lower neighbourhood crime. The results are in the table below.

**Table 7.3 Percentage Community Cohesion Outcomes (more or much more likely)**

<b>If I saw children skipping school and hanging out on a street corner</b>	<b>If I saw children putting graffiti on a local building</b>	<b>If children were showing disrespect to an adult</b>	<b>If a fight broke out in front of where I live</b>	<b>If the fire station closes to my home was in danger of having its budget cut</b>
43.7	56.6	65.7	45.8	64.3

When compared to the DES research, rates of learners being more likely to do something are broadly similar except in the case of seeing children skipping school, where in the DES research 79% of learners said that they would be more likely to do something about it.

When analysed for significance we can see that women and those with less than lower secondary education would be more likely to do something about children skipping school. Women were also more likely than men to do something about the fire station closest to their home having its budget cut as were people over 65 in the sample.

Learners indicated most frequently that the overall atmosphere in the group helped them achieve the outcomes presented in this chapter (28%), followed by the way the tutor/facilitator treated people taking part in the group (23%).

## ANALYSIS

The results show that the types of outcomes that learners are least likely to experience in this research are outcomes related to civic engagement or social action. It is difficult to know if that means that centres did not meet learners' initially high motivations to become more involved in the community when they began community education. If participation in a programme is a means to this end then community education meets this need, but

## 7 COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL ACTION

if it is about learners moving into other aspects of community participation then the need may not be being met as effectively as it could.

Of note is that providers were very clear that community education is about combating disadvantage at national and local level but were less sure that community education should prepare learners for community development as just over half agreed or strongly agreed to this statement. This disposition may impact on the implementation of a social action model and related outcomes as learners described experiencing the two models related to this approach least frequently and rates of civic engagement outcomes were comparatively low.

However, to be more nuanced in this analysis it is important to note that for some of the outcomes the community education experience resulted in significant amounts of learners not already doing some of the actions beginning to do so, namely talking to friends and family about politics or social issues, voting and registering to vote and donating to charity.

We can see that the participants in the DES research indicated more frequently than in the current piece of research that they achieved the outcomes of starting to volunteer and deciding to give back to the community.

There are high rates of learners experiencing the community cohesion outcomes measured.

## DISCUSSION

The literature asserts that radical adult learning should be connected to the aims of a social movement. It is clear that, at the level of the organisations, providers see themselves connected into combating disadvantage at a broader level, although the research did not ask if this connection was in terms of specific social movements. However, a significant proportion of participating centres did not agree that learners should be prepared for social change and community development and be connected into these through the learning. It would also appear that learners may not be, being explicitly told of community education's function in achieving social change as it relates to the adjectives and models used to describe this in community education.

We are told that progression to community participation can be blocked if the learning environment is not open enough or is governed by a traditional tutor/ student approach. A significant amount of learning provided through the centres is vocational and raises

the question as to whether or not this type of learning involves such an approach and limits the extent to which learners can talk about and be encouraged to take action on disadvantage if they so choose.

However, the results do show that there are moderate rates of achievement of outcomes related to voting and discussing social and political issues. These rates may occur because many centres provide voter education. Also the most frequently provided type of learning was social and personal development, which means that there must be space in these settings to discuss social issues such that learners are beginning to talk about them outside the learning setting. However, given that generally social action outcomes were not that frequent we must ask the extent to which learners are being encouraged from talk to action. Also the types of outcomes most frequently indicated like voting and donating to charities are related to a liberal model of active citizenship which does not favour radical action like protest or critiquing how decisions are made in communities. Providers may wish to ask to what extent and which civic engagement outcomes they would like to see learners achieve.

# 8

## COMMUNITY EDUCATION IN PRACTICE

This chapter presents data from the case studies carried out for the research. Six case studies were carried out. Each case study consisted of interviews with: the co-ordinator/manager of the centre or project; a tutor working in the organisation, and two learners – one past and one present. A narrative of each case is presented in the sections below. Data for each case is categorised into sections, each considering one of the features of a social action model of community education.

### The Warrenmount Community Education Centre

#### **Overview**

Warrenmount Community Education Centre is located in the South Inner City of Dublin and caters to around 300 learners at any one time. It runs a variety of personal development, vocational, arts, health, ESOL and IT training programmes up to FETAC Level 5. It is not currently running any programmes specifically focused on community development.

Opened in 1995, by the Presentation Congregation the centre aims to meet the needs of the local community through creating opportunities, building confidence and developing skills. It works towards the following objectives:

- To create a community education and development centre, for local people, which meets the real needs of the area as they emerge. Participation by local people in the management and running of the Centre is a priority.
- To liaise with existing agencies to identify and address needs not being met.
- To promote an atmosphere, as outlined in the Mission Statement, and to offer opportunities and programmes which responds to the needs of the people in the area.
- To influence policies, decision-making structures and systems, so as to bring about systemic change<sup>77</sup>.

Key principles informing the work include: collective advancement, participation, empowerment, active citizenship, and innovative and creative methodologies.

The approach to community education outlined above is echoed by both the centre manager and the tutor interviewed for the case study. As the manager said, “[Community

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<sup>77</sup> See [www.warrenmountcentre.ie](http://www.warrenmountcentre.ie)

education] is about meeting the needs of the immediate community, making every effort to provide that in the context of educational terms... if we hear a whisper we try to address it." Similarly, the tutor said, "it's about... looking at the educational needs of your area and doing what you can to satisfy those needs in order to improve the community."

The centre provides work experience for some learners through a community employment scheme run through the centre.

### ***Reaching Learners Experiencing Disadvantage***

The manager reported that the centre was initially opened to address the needs of parents of children in the local primary and secondary schools to break the cycle of poverty in the area. Since then, the brief has been broadened to include the whole local community. However, the centre is located in a disadvantaged area in Dublin and works to address unemployment in the area and to foster the well-being of individuals attending. A number of learners who attend the centre are also immigrants.

The tutor – who teaches computers, health and safety and some ESOL – described community education as learning for people who have been failed by the formal education system and that these are the individuals who generally attend the centre. In particular, the present learner interviewed for the case study had, had this experience. He left school at lower secondary and reports negative experiences of school and said "I hated school." Now unable to work in his chosen field of construction due to disability he was referred to Warrenmount through his local social welfare office and reported his motivation for a return to learning as, "[I] will have to take a different career direction, use my head rather than my hands."

The past learner interviewed had completed upper secondary education, but had been made unemployed prior to joining the centre.

### ***Social Recognition and Attention to Barriers***

Both the tutor and the manager were clear that the development of self-esteem was central to community education, because learners lacked social recognition due to educational disadvantage, "confidence has been battered out of them [the learners] ... [they] don't put value on what they have achieved." The manager of the centre described the focus on recognition as the way in which they implement a radical focus to community education.

The development of confidence was described as important to a positive experience of the learning and helping learners to find something they can build on and to find their own strengths, “just to give them the recognition of all the skills they have” (centre manager). It is accomplished through the development of mutual respect between tutor and learners and amongst learners. Overcoming a lack of self-esteem and confidence was described as important to enabling people to act, “[it’s about] building the capacity of the individual and empowering them to be able to say something... to give them an arrow going somewhere” (centre manager). In line with this perspective, progression was seen as learner-defined and about a learner “taking control of their own learning... helping them find that definition of progression” (centre manager).

Both learners reported an increase in confidence as a result of attending the centre. For the present learner his experience has resulted in him focusing on trying to get a better job. For the past learner, who reported that her confidence was ‘floored’ when she came to the centre said, “they nurture you and they do encourage you and feel you can achieve, I needed that belief in me... it really was the first step on the ladder and the belief that I could do more.” This experience resulted in her moving on to study childcare at a local college of further education and ultimately, into third level study.

Both learners described constant support and encouragement from the centre and the tutors, “if I’d had these teachers when I was in school it would have been... a lot better” (present learner). At an organisational level Warrenmount offers a number of supports to learners such as an onsite café, counselling, language and literacy support and referrals to the local adult education guidance service. While most of the promotion is carried out through word of mouth, the centre does do outreach work by actively linking with local service providers and taking referrals and sometimes, sending a leaflet home to parents through children in the local schools. The manager described the importance of getting to know each learner individually.

### **Critical Reflection**

The tutor interviewed described a Freirean process for learning, which is central to the development of critical reflection, “[Community education is] about changing people’s terms of reference... getting them to look at things that happened to them from a more objective perspective, the way others look at it.” This process was facilitated by an examination of issues like poverty, crime, addiction and, “getting them to look at that environment, as an entity, as a thing,” so that “problems are less personalised.” The tutor also linked learning that helps to see issues and society in this way as a means to develop agency, “there are things that they can do to change themselves... how they react

to things." In particular, this process was important in getting people to challenge their perspective of themselves inculcated by the formal education system. The ability to carry out this process was seen as an important skill for a community education tutor.

The manager described the development of critical reflection in terms of the development of self-reflection by helping learners to understand their own learning style and to listen to others. The current learner with the centre identified that he had developed an increased understanding of people from other cultures. The past learner reported that the centre had nurtured her own commitment and passion to addressing disadvantage through her work in childcare.

### ***Experiential Learning***

A commitment to experiential learning and learner-centredness was described by both the manager and the tutor, "[it's about] making the learning meaningful for them [the learners] make it applicable.. have a direct experience of whatever the topic is, to bring things that may seem very far removed close to them" (tutor).

Listening is a central feature of the work. At the organisational level, this task happens through learner evaluations and consultations. Within the learning group it happens by creating a space where there is lots of discussion and people can ask questions. The result of this open space is, "when they listen to each other they don't feel so alone in their problems." This reflection also encourages the development of critical thinking.

Both learners described outcomes linked to this approach. The current learner acknowledged how learners in his programme help each other out. The past learner described how programmes were made interesting and doable by tutors.

### ***Community Development and Social Action***

The centre did not describe working with learners within groups to devise and implement actions to address disadvantage. However, the manager reported that she would like to see civic engagement outcomes happen for learners. The centre has provided voter awareness education in the past. Rather than encouraging deliberative action the manager and the tutor described the encouragement of skills for civic engagement, including community development, through the development of a belief in the individual learner's capacity to act and say something. The manager said, "[it's about] enabling a situation that social change can happen versus creating it."

This belief in a capacity to act was seen to be fostered by the learner community in the centre mirroring learners' local community and helping them to "recognise the communities that they are involved in and how they can serve them and serve their society a bit better."

The learning environment in Warrenmount is democratised through the class contract, the development of mutual respect through listening and a non-judgemental environment. The tutor felt that the ability to foster these facets in the learning environment was important for a community education tutor.

The past learner interviewed indicated that she wanted to begin to volunteer as a result of her time in Warrenmount, "I want to give something back to my community, Warrenmount is at the heart of that."

At an organisational level the centre reports working to foster social change through its involvement with AONTAS and the Community Education Network.

### **Knockanrawley Resource Centre**

Knockanrawley Resource Centre (KRC) is a community development project offering community education programmes as part of a range of activities responding to the needs of Tipperary Town and its environs. Working with around 100 learners at any one time, the centre is FETAC accredited and offers parenting, vocational preparation, personal development and arts programmes. KRC's mission is: to encourage, foster and empower people and groups in our community to identify and make changes that enhance their lives.

Its' objectives are to:

- Work from the community development principles of being open to, and encouraging participation by, all sections of our community.
- Offer new opportunities for personal development, training, education and support services particularly to those lacking choice, resources and power.
- Support and work with the community and other groups to promote positive changes in policy that affect them<sup>78</sup>.

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78 See [www.knockanrawley.ie](http://www.knockanrawley.ie)

Community education is seen as part of a holistic, integrated service offered by KRC, which includes community development, counselling and family therapy, childcare and organic gardening activities. It was described by the tutor and co-ordinators<sup>79</sup> interviewed as a process that is learner-centred addressing the whole of a learner's life, allowing the learner to "take control of their lives and ultimately improve the lives of their immediate family and their neighbourhood" (co-ordinators).

### ***Reaching Learners Experiencing Disadvantage***

KRC was originally started as a centre for the Pearse Park estate in Tipperary Town, which is a disadvantaged area. Since then the centre's catchment has been widened to take in the whole of the town as far as 20 miles outside its environs. While the programmes are for the whole community, the centre reaches people who are dealing with multiple forms of social exclusion such as educational disadvantage, low self-esteem, domestic violence, mental health issues, poverty and substance abuse. Many of the funding programmes resourcing the centre are aimed at disadvantaged target groups. If possible, KRC prefers to have a mix of backgrounds within learner groups.

Both the past and present learners interviewed for this case study were facing a number of the issues presented in the paragraph above. The present learner was a lone parent who described a lack of childcare support, income inadequacy and confidence as barriers to her progression. The past learner was also parenting alone and described a need to address social isolation as an initial motivation for attending the centre.

### ***Social Recognition and Attention to Barriers***

KRC recognises that individuals cannot engage in community education unless they address the social issues they are facing that might block them from participation, "everyone is treated within their own uniqueness and their own barriers" (tutor). The present learner also described the importance of this work, "people come here and learn but before they can, it's important to heal themselves as people and then I think you get more out of a person, sometimes it takes awhile to get to that place."

The centre addresses learner barriers on a number of fronts. First, there is space within learning settings to bring these issues up and examine what can be done about them. Second, the centre is able to offer a number of supports onsite such as, check-ins,

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<sup>79</sup> The co-ordinator of KRC was maternity leave at time of interview and this function was being held by two other staff.

counselling and family therapy, literacy support, childcare, transport allowances (if funding allows), MABS, CABS, and health professional talks onsite and one-to-one support and guidance (including domestic violence and addictions outreach services). The centre co-ordinators and the tutor indicated the importance of knowing individuals personally and, "coming up with the best supports to suit the learners." Both learners acknowledged the constant support and encouragement of the centre throughout their journeys.

KRC attracts and recruits learners through such activities as word of mouth, referrals from service providers, leaflet drops and door-to-door outreach.

As with the other case studies KRC asserts strongly the need to engage in recognition work with learners, and that increased self-esteem and confidence are key outcomes for the learning, because, "through life experience [they] have lost self-esteem" (co-ordinators). The development of self-belief is integral to learners' progression and the capacity to act, "If a person hasn't got self-belief, they can't take on the system... without highering of self-esteem the choices don't appear for the next stage" (tutor). For KRC progression was learner-defined including just "getting out of bed" to pursuing a third level qualification. An ability to know and address the issues an individual might be facing in their lives in a boundaried way was identified as an important skill for a community educator.

Both the learners described the positive impact of social recognition. The present learner said, "you feel valued [your] confidence starts to lift, it can open doors to other things." She indicated that as a result of her time in KRC she was going to do a diploma in social care and art in the upcoming academic year. The past learner progressed through a number of programmes within KRC and then moved to a further education college to complete a social studies diploma and is currently in the midst of a community development degree. She credits KRC with the encouragement she needed to progress.

### **Critical Reflection**

The importance of raising people's awareness of the "issues that have kept them down, isolated them," was described as a key task for a community educator and an ability to foster social analysis was seen as an important skill (tutor). The co-ordinators echoed this by saying that community education was about having "a sense of the neighbourhood they want to live in and how to shape that."

Thus, community education for KRC is about situating the learner's life situation within the systems and structures that have shaped it. The tutor, who facilitates personal development and support groups, described using a number of ways to engage learners

in the process of critical reflection such as connecting the high price of food to global issues, examining the fight for the right of women to vote, and exploring the roots of different beliefs like a learner saying, 'I would never go to college'. Work on self-esteem was also seen as key to developing critical reflection skills, "[they] can work at their own marginalisation and can change their life... can move out but in an active way, not just become part of the mainstream that marginalised them in the first place" (tutor).

The present learner described learning to see people's circumstances differently as a result of community education and not to make assumptions about them while the past learner indicated that as a result of her time with KRC she gained the confidence to speak out about discrimination and to teach her daughter the importance of equality and fairness.

### ***Experiential Learning***

Prior life experience was described as central to the learning in programmes in KRC, "[we want] a positive, empowering learning experience, to be in a place where they [learners] are supported, not judged and respected, valued for who they are and that their life experience is valued" (co-ordinators) This approach also fosters social recognition and life experience is seen as prior learning. It was described as allowing community education to have an impact on people's lives holistically, which was seen as integral to the process.

Key ways of ensuring this approach include relationships of equality in the learner group where, "everyone has as much to offer the class as the tutor themselves, equality across the board" (co-ordinators). Every term tutors work with groups to develop a work plan for the term, ensuring that content is co-defined. Group contracts are seen as central to an emphasis on the value of life experience, as well as getting learners to talk about the issues they face in their own lives.

For the present learner this approach helped to develop perspective on her own situation and those of others, "you think you have it bad, it puts things into perspective, it's good for people to know that... listening... that you are not alone."

### ***Community Development and Social Action***

As can be seen KRC has a clear commitment to community development and one of its functions is to engage in this work. It engages in policy work and lobbying and the experience of learners is fed into that work through evaluations and listening to learners. KRC is also part of the CEN in AONTAS.

At the learner level civic engagement is encouraged. In the women's groups run through the centre, learners do work to carry out actions that they have come up with as well as to get involved in the planning and implementation of events to raise awareness about women's equality such as International Women's Day and the 16 Days of Action against Violence against Women.

In other programmes social action and civic engagement is promoted at the individual level. Learners are encouraged to become involved in their local communities. Work to increase confidence is seen as essential to learners moving out into their local areas. The centre has run active citizenship training. "[We are] hoping that we make them thirsty," said the co-ordinators. Within programmes volunteering is promoted and learners are offered the opportunity to sit on KRC sub-committees, to get involved in awareness raising events, and other social action events are signposted within the centre. If learners need it they are also encouraged to seek appointments with local TDs or the county council on issues affecting them.

It is the social justice aspect of community education, according to the tutor, that is one of the aspects that makes it different to other types of adult education. The past learner's desire to pursue community development study demonstrates how this facet encourages learners to become involved in social change. This learner was clear about the role of community education, "it is the way of getting communities together and getting people involved."

### **Croi na Gaillimhe Resource Centre**

Located in Galway City, Croi na Gaillimhe is a purpose-built, intergenerational community education and resource centre for disadvantaged groups. Started in 2009, this centre is under the auspices of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul Galway. The centre was founded out of a community feasibility study and is committed to a community development approach to its work. It offers a range of programmes, including social groups, health and fitness, creative writing, an intergenerational project and IT training. It is offering some programmes aimed at fostering community development skills, in particular, a Training for Transformation programme.

The vision of Croi na Gaillimhe is: to provide an inter-generational and inter-cultural place of welcome, especially for disadvantaged groups, offering a range of holistic and learning supports complementing and linked to the work of relevant agencies in Galway<sup>80</sup>. It has

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80 Croi na Gaillimhe Strategic Plan, 2012-2014.

three to four staff complemented by 77 volunteers who cater to around 175 learners at any one time. The centre is not FETAC accredited and this is seen to as an advantage to the centre's ability to be flexible to the needs of learners.

Community education was described as having a number of elements: reducing isolation, building social networks, and building up the community and self-confidence of learners.

### ***Reaching Learners Experiencing Disadvantage***

As seen in the vision, this centre specifically targets disadvantaged target groups. Each strategic plan thus far has clearly defined who those target groups will be. Over 2009-2011 the focus was older people and youth. For 2012-2014, the emphasis will continue to be on older people, as well as young parents, migrants and men. Intergenerational activities and training programmes will form the basis of the work to address the isolation of older people, integration of new communities, unemployment and lone parenting. It has been, up to now, perceived as a centre purely for older people. While these are an important target group for the Centre, management is anxious that the centre is seen as a resource for the whole community.

Both learners interviewed for this case study were older learners. The past learner described himself as retired and had finished school at upper secondary. The present learner was also retired with a vocational qualification, but had been referred by her social worker due to health issues and isolation in the home. The tutor, who is a voluntary tutor, facilitates IT learning at the centre, described literacy as a key issue for many of the older learners she works with.

### ***Social Recognition and Attention to Barriers***

The tutor and the manager of the centre were very clear that without the development of self-confidence and self-esteem it would be impossible for learners to participate in the learning and progress in whatever way they define progression. The tutor said, "[community education] is about self-confidence .. taking responsibility for your own direction... if you don't have self-esteem then you are wasting time." This outcome is central because, "if you look at the majority of people, even coming in the door of this place is a problem [they're] too afraid... their self-esteem has been so battered" (manager). The centre also works to develop the self-esteem of learners by offering taster courses.

The current learner interviewed mentioned the development of self-confidence as a result of attending computer classes at the centre, "the confidence I got from it was amazing." She described a significant fear about attending. She had to be encouraged by her social

worker. Then, when she came through the door, “the warmth, how I was introduced to different people, how I was taken into it and got to know people,” allowed her to continue with the learning. She describes the impact of improved confidence as “I am now able to do things by myself.” Her goals for learning include learning to use Skype. The past learner indicated a desire to become involved in an activity focused on local history.

Social recognition and attention to barriers is carried out through relationships of equality and consistent encouragement in the centre often in a one-to-one context, “[We want] an equal relationship, an open relationship, would like the learner to feel they can say if they’re having issues that were stopping them learning.” The centre carries out outreach and promotion through referral links to local services, posters, letter drops to homes in the area, word of mouth, and their own communication products. They support learners through hospitality, a warm welcome, ringing them if they do not attend, and one-to-one support.

### ***Critical Reflection***

The tutor interviewed described fostering critical reflection through the learners’ individual reflection on “what has worked and what hasn’t worked [in the learning], an awful lot of practice and being asked to think about how they would use it [the knowledge] at home.” She also described evaluation as important to the development of critical reflection.

The manager described a need for the centre to grow into a more political and radical focus where, for instance, older people might be involved in a group that would advocate for their rights. She described the work of participants on a training course called “Looking at the Economy Through Women’s Eyes” as one way in which the centre has provided opportunities for the development of critical reflection.

### ***Experiential Learning***

The tutor clearly described a learning process of starting where learners were at, responding to their needs and building curriculum by exploring their expectations prior to the start of a programme and this skill was key for a community education tutor. In this way, she could teach IT to older learners in particular, by making it relevant to them, whether it was about helping learners to use Skype so they could ring children living in other countries, or helping someone to set up a Paddy Power account, or using a visa card online. The manager echoed that this approach was what she wanted for learning in the centre.

Both the learners indicated experiencing an approach that started where they were at, “They were so helpful, made sure that you understood everything, broke it down into layman’s language and did everything in their power to help you” (past learner).

### ***Community Development and Social Action***

As indicated the centre takes a community development approach to the work overall. The centre sees its contribution to local and social change through the provision of voter awareness in the centre, participation in AONTAS' work nationally, being involved with a local refugee support group, being involved in research and through "changing people's views" when they attend the centre (manager). While not written down, there is a commitment to fostering civic engagement outcomes for learners. The manager would like to strengthen the development of skills in learners to become involved in social action by providing more activities aimed at this goal, such as the ones described in the section on critical reflection above.

The Manager described some of the courses the centre provides to encourage social action. The centre already offers a community leadership programme called Training for Transformation Skills (TFT) for effecting change. The economic literacy programme described above involved learners promoting an awareness of global issues across the centre and the importance of buying free trade. The centre also runs an intergenerational learning project for teenagers and older adults in partnership with NUI Galway and the Galway Community College that aims to respond to issues shared by the younger and older people involved.

The tutor described a purpose for community education, which entailed building capacity in the community by building the learner group capacity and the capacity of the individual to be responsible. In terms of her subject area she indicated helping learners to use technology to get government information on pensions and health, but not in terms of encouraging civic engagement or social action. The Manager felt that social action may follow with some encouragement once people start to engage with Information Technology and are more fully informed of services available or not available to them.

### **St. Catherine's Community Services Centre**

This centre is located in Carlow and offers around 250 – 300 learners programmes related to social and personal development, vocational training and health and fitness. It is FETAC accredited. Its mission is: to provide quality services responsive to local needs, based on equality, diversity, justice and inclusion with a view to empowering and enriching individuals, families and communities in Carlow and its environs<sup>81</sup>.

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81 See [www.catherines.ie](http://www.catherines.ie)

St. Catherine's engages in both youth and community work. Activities are not solely focused on education and training, but also include, older people's support, work with Travelling community, a teen parents support programme, early childhood education and intercultural work. The centre does not run, but hosts a range of other services onsite, including Legal Aid, ACCORD and the Citizen's Information Service.

Community education was described by this centre as a link between the grassroots and formal education, "empowering people, a first step back into education... to make people active citizens, make sure people vote... bringing people from where they are at, to move into a less supported environment" (co-ordinator). It can consist of a variety of learning opportunities ranging from taster courses to accredited learning that bridges the learner into further education and in a few cases, onto degree courses.

### ***Reaching Learners Experiencing Disadvantage***

St Catherine's caters to the whole of Carlow Town, but as can be seen above works with a range of target groups, many of whom would be experiencing social exclusion, including the Travelling community and lone parents. The co-ordinator describes encountering the following issues with learners, low educational attainment, mental health issues, poverty, low self-esteem and domestic violence. Day-time programmes are generally resourced through funding streams focused on disadvantaged target groups such as the BTEI Community Strand, Health Services Executive, FAS, and the Department of Social Protection.

The tutor interviewed for this case study was clear that community education was usually about engaging, "people who may have left the education system at an early stage... or may have been in the home." Three learners were interviewed for this case study, two present and one past. The past learner said she left school at lower secondary and parents by herself. Present Learner A described an experience of chronic health issues and both present learners indicated a need to get back into learning and gain confidence after being in the home for a long period of time.

### ***Social Recognition and Attention to Barriers***

The co-ordinator of the centre described the importance of a learning experience that caters to the person as a whole and is learner-centred. Both the tutor and the co-ordinator reflected the need to "go the extra mile" with learners, "to know the learner as an individual, to support them in a way that doesn't happen in mainstream" (tutor). In St. Catherine's this kind of support happens through one-to-one support, childcare, referrals

to other agencies externally and in-house, hospitality and literacy support. All the learners interviewed indicated that staff helped learners deal with outside problems if they need it.

Learners are targeted through mail drops to local RAPID estates, word of mouth, ads in newsletters and parish notes, visits to Traveller halting sites locally and referrals from other service providers. The presence of so many services onsite in St. Catherine's means that there are a significant amount of referrals from them to the educational programmes the centre provides.

The tutor described the importance of facilitating learning in a way that was confidence building and both she and the co-ordinator named increased self-esteem as an outcome for community education. The co-ordinator described the importance of community education defining success in a different way to other forms of adult learning, "in a PLC your own definition of success is whether you pass or not, here there are lots of opportunities for successes." This requirement to achieve recognition for learners was attributed to the lack of self-esteem in learners due to their life histories, "and years of not having self-worth" (co-ordinator). Both the tutor and co-ordinator identified the importance of relationships of equality in the learning setting.

Success and progression was, as in the other centres, learner-defined, "it's academic progression but also if someone can come in the door and look you in the eye [we] value the soft outcomes equally if not more." The tutor acknowledged the need to be prepared to help learners overcome hurdles and discussed the importance of recognition for learners, "a lot of people have had a bad experience of learning and feel that the system has let them down [they feel] they can't make a contribution... people learn better when they value themselves [learn to] put a value on what they do."

All the learners described experiencing consistent praise and encouragement at St. Catherine's, "you never feel inadequate" (Learner A, present). All had specific progression goals as a result of their time there. The past learner hoped to pursue a degree in social work when her children were old enough. Both present learners wanted to move into FETAC Level 5 programmes in the local VEC, one in Health Care Skills and the other in office administration.

### ***Critical Reflection***

When asked specifically about how she works to develop critical reflection the tutor emphasised the acquisition of reflective thinking for the individual through self-evaluation, setting personal goals and catering to different learning styles. When asked about key

tasks for a community educator she noted the ability to connect the local community's issues to the global in order to demonstrate the ripple effect of actions elsewhere on individuals' lives. The co-ordinator indicated the importance of people raising their voices on issues in order to realise, "their voice is as equal to everybody else's." This outcome was linked to the achievement of active citizenship for learners.

The present learners interviewed, in particular, identified the impact of attending St. Catherine's on their awareness and understanding of other cultures.

### ***Experiential Learning***

The past learner interviewed describes how learning is experiential in the centre, "it can end up in a conversation about anything and the teacher will join in." The tutor and co-ordinator expressed the need to relate learning back to everyday life.

Learners are encouraged to learn from one another, "[to] see how others solve their problems" (tutor). The tutor described how the requirements of FETAC accreditation can limit the opportunity for learners to define content, "I try to give some scope, but it's time consuming, can be limiting, the most important thing is that they are clear on what they have to do and how it will be done, milestones to set."

Learners indicated experiencing tutors as approachable, "don't even feel like pupil and tutor... can pick things up much easier in the group, talking as a group, not like being in school everybody helps one another" (Learner A, present).

### ***Community Development and Social Action***

The organisation works for social change at a broader level through its involvement in a number of decision-making fora in the county such as the County Development Board, the community and voluntary forum, and the Social Inclusion Measures Committee. It also links with AONTAS and NALA at national level. The centre supports the Carlow Traveller Community Network, which reports a number of instances of participants moving into social action, including participation in the Regional Travellers Health Network, South East Traveller Health Unit, the Irish Travellers Movement and the National Traveller Women's Forum.

There was some indication of learners working together on social change, such as the centre's lone parent programme "Moving On" participants writing to local TDs. For the most part, both the tutor and co-ordinator mentioned the importance of fostering civic engagement for learners individually as part of the overall approach to the centre, "[it's not]

a conscious radical challenge to anything, more of a general being aware, trying to create change in the person themselves so they can link in to create further social change." The tutor talked about how community education can focus on the civic mind and community spirit and asking learners whether or not they feel part of a community. She said that the focus on these types of outcomes can depend on the type of programme, but that "learning promotes the idea of accountability and rights and responsibilities..[it's about] giving people the confidence to speak and put together an argument."

Learners are encouraged to become involved in volunteering, voting and to get involved in fundraising for the centre and speak at graduations. Some participants are asked to participate in the decision-making fora named above and that for those who are engaged in structured one-to-one support that process promotes involvement in the community.

All the learners interviewed said that they had voted in the last election as a result of attending St. Catherine's. The two present learners both indicated they had begun to volunteer as well. The co-ordinator reflected that some people who had attended as learners have come back to work within the centre.

### **Men Alone in no Man's Land (MAIN)**

MAIN is a community education project that carries out group and one-to-one work with around 55 disadvantaged men in Dublin's Inner City in a variety of locations. The organisation currently has no dedicated premises. MAIN was launched in 2008 with a report into the needs of men experiencing social exclusion in the North Inner City and provides a range of programmes including, arts, drama, computer literacy, personal development and active citizenship. Its objectives are to:

- Promote and encourage men's personal confidence and effectiveness.
- Create a threat-free, non-intrusive environment where men can feel welcome and belong.
- Promote men's health, training and security of tenure.
- Help men access other services as appropriate.

MAIN has no paid staff except five part-time tutors. One full-time volunteer co-ordinator and six part-time volunteers carry out the work alongside those tutors.

Community education was described by the tutor and the manager as a process that exposes people to a different perspective and changes any negative perceptions they may have had about formal education as well as breaking isolation. The tutor said, "people can bring their own requirements, their own interests it comes from the community itself... could be quite local, those demands inform the education programme."

### ***Reaching Learners Experiencing Disadvantage***

The project targets disadvantaged men and describes the following social exclusion issues for learners: literacy difficulties; social isolation; addiction; unemployment; suicide; educational disadvantage, and income poverty. While the tutor indicated that community education was for the whole community he acknowledged that it was, "maybe for people who have slipped through the net educationally."

The current learner<sup>82</sup> interviewed for this case study had finished school at upper secondary, worked in part-time employment and had a history of mental health issues. He indicated that his experience was one of "100% isolation." He described his situation as, "I may appear as someone who has it all together... but at home it's very different."

### ***Social Recognition and Attention to Barriers***

MAIN does intensive outreach work by taking referrals through other services, but also by going into the spaces that the men they are targeting frequent like local pubs and also visiting men at home until they are ready to join group programmes. It also works with City of Dublin VEC and the Dublin Adult Learning Centre to recruit and progress learners.

The experience of feeling valued was described as important to the learning experience offered in MAIN, "to feel it's not threatening, everybody in the room is of the same value, their voice is as valued as anybody else's in the room" (co-ordinator).

Further supports are offered such as the encouragement of peer learning, referrals to counselling in local services, literacy support, check-ins with learners and going into groups to see how people were getting on. Both the tutor and the co-ordinator referred to the development of self-esteem as an important outcome. The co-ordinator explained its importance by differentiating the learners MAIN works with from those who might attend a programme in a further education college, "people who are engaging by their own volition already have sufficient confidence, they are going to be looking at PLC courses... to

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82 No past learner was interviewed as he was unable to attend the interview on the day scheduled.

get the people we're working with [they need] time in pre-development to give them the level of confidence needed to move on given their current condition" (co-ordinator).

For the tutor, developing confidence involved working through drama and creative writing to "encourage people that they have these abilities... they discover talents they always had." A sense of personal agency is further enhanced by working with learners to develop: public speaking skills; research skills; the ability to express their issues, and skills for preparing newsletters.

The learner interviewed described a "very positive, very supportive," experience and describes feeling "lighter on my feet" as a result of the programme he attends in MAIN. His experience has resulted in him hoping to become part of the management committee of the project and to move into another programme in the project that was more formal to "get some little skills." Progression is defined within the project by the learner's capacity to move into other areas they want to go to, whether that is further education or "someone who once wouldn't say anything, being able to stand up and say something" (co-ordinator).

### ***Critical Reflection***

Both the tutor and the co-ordinator described encouraging critical reflection through an exploration of the individual's circumstances and thinking about how that is shaped by institutions in society, "to see why the institutions aren't working for them, to allow them to start to question things more... to look at each resource and [how] facilities in an area can be enhanced, agitate for things for their own community" (tutor).

The tutor described fostering these skills by developing learners' questioning skills, or exploring motive and agenda through editorial comment in newspapers. The ability to facilitate critical reflection was perceived as valuable for a tutor in community education.

### ***Experiential Learning***

The tutor interviewed described the importance of negotiating content with learners since having ownership fosters engagement, but also noted a tension between just going with what learners want or "should you bring in something like Shakespeare, or should it be based on people's own life experience?" He stressed the importance of looking at the wider needs of the community and that this "community added value" was important to community education. Being aware of the conditions within a local area and being able to apply this to learning were seen as important skills for community education tutors.

However, he prioritised the knowledge of the group for learning, “[the relationship between tutor and learner] is one of mutual respect, it cannot be a case of the tutor being the person of all knowledge [it] must be based on the idea sometimes that the student has more knowledge than the tutor [it’s about] leading people to knowledge.”

According to the co-ordinator learning in the project should be participatory and, “courses evolve out of existing opportunities, are learner-defined according to their needs and their pace.” He named that learning should also draw on people’s life experience and that the project learns from that experience, “we’ve learnt more from them [the learners] than they have learned from us.”

The learner interviewed described the facilitator of his group as “one of the lads” and that in the group he is in, “they really encourage you to speak about your issues.”

### ***Community Development and Social Action***

Both the tutor and co-ordinator were clear about the link between learning and preparation for civic engagement and social action. The co-ordinator indicated that political and civic engagement were outcomes for the learning, which starts with learners voicing issues in the group and then moving to civic engagement opportunities, “if they realise the importance of the voice they have.” He describes this process as the project’s work for social change in the local community, “by making people aware that they have a voice and that matters, that they can very quickly move into a collective response... [it’s about] bringing them to a space where change can be affected.”

The project encourages learners to talk to their local TDs, or attend community forums, or go to the city council to ask questions. MAIN has also run voter awareness programmes.

The tutor indicated that a key task for a community education tutor was enabling learners to do something with their community and develop skills “that are transferable to the residents association or trade union.” As already indicated, the learner interviewed had decided as a result of his involvement with MAIN that he would like to begin to volunteer for the project and also named the issue of suicide as one that he thought important to address for men.

At an organisational level the project works to achieve social change nationally through its involvement with the CEN in AONTAS as well as networking with other men’s projects through the Men’s Sheds Network. It is also associated with the Dublin City Community Forum and is community partners with the Dublin Institute of Technology Student with Learning Communities.

### **Blayney Blades Ltd.**

Blayney Blades is a FETAC accredited community development and education project located in the IONTAS, a community resource centre in Castleblaney, County Monaghan. Catering to around 240 learners at a time, it offers a variety of accredited and non-accredited courses including arts and crafts, social and personal development and vocational training programmes, as well as a cross-border cross community-training programme that is not FETAC accredited. The vision of the project is: that women and their families in the Castleblaney area have access to all the personal, social and educational help they require in their quest for a fuller and involved life. The mission is: Blayney Blades is a women's group committed to promoting and supporting the holistic development of women and their families so that they may develop their own potential and play an active role in their communities<sup>83</sup>.

Community education was described by the tutor and the co-ordinator as a second chance educational process where learners could develop any skills that they choose to pursue, "[it's] a link between State education and further education... one of the functions would be to target those who didn't get a chance to participate in second level education, it's a different type of education, it would involve more learner-centred [approaches] where not only academic pursuits are highlighted, but other softer skills are highlighted – confidence-building and self-esteem" (tutor). Another objective would be to improve the local community.

#### ***Reaching Learners Experiencing Disadvantage***

The project predominantly works with women, but has recently opened up programmes to men. The issues facing learners include poverty, rural isolation as well as lack of childcare and transport. There is also a large population of immigrants in the area and integration is a key issue for the project, responded to through the establishment of a specific project within the organisation called Blayney Blades International.

As can be seen in the section above there is an understanding in the project that community education is for people who might not have had an adequate opportunity for first chance education. Both learners interviewed for this case study had finished school at lower secondary. When she first started to attend Blayney Blades the past learner was parenting alone and described herself as having, "serious mental health issues at that

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83 see [www.iontascastleblaney.ie](http://www.iontascastleblaney.ie)

time." The present learner said, "What I really wanted was confidence and to learn new skills. I would have left school early and my education wouldn't have been great."

### ***Social Recognition and Attention to Barriers***

The present learner interviewed described the impact of educational disadvantage on her self-esteem, "[leaving school early] played a big part in not having confidence, self-esteem and self worth because you felt inferior to other people." As can be seen in the centre's description of community education, fostering self-esteem and confidence are crucial to the work for the reason offered by the learner above.

This recognition work allows people to move to the next level in whatever way the learner chooses, "[it] totally depends on the participant" (co-ordinator). Addressing barriers for learners and helping them identify goals is carried out by knowing people individually and doing one-to-one work, "[we retain learners] by offering the next level, by assessing what it is they need to do, actively researching that individual and delivering what they want" (co-ordinator). The tutor was clear that a role for the community educator was to, "help in other ways other than education, like problem-solving and access to other organisations and facilities, maybe advice giving." Given that this kind of work and the process of community education is different to other types of adult learning, the tutor felt that any community educator should shadow someone working in the sector before they begin to facilitate themselves.

Blayney Blades offer supports to learners such as referrals to onsite counselling and external services, places in the childcare service located in IONTAS and one-to-one support. Both learners described being encouraged and coached by Blayney Blades throughout their journeys, which helped them to overcome any barrier they experienced. They directly attributed this encouragement to the achievement of progression goals. For the present learner, she had moved into further education and had started her own business before returning to Blayney Blades to learn, "though all those stages would have been encouraged and supported by the Blades."

The recognition and support provided by Blayney Blades enabled the past learner to move into further education and then into third level study, "they enabled me to be a qualified professional, provided me with stability, with lifetime relationships, it integrated me into my community in a way that I never envisaged I could integrate." This learner has also tutored in the project.

### ***Critical Reflection***

In this case study the tutor, who facilitates IT learning, reflected on the challenges of enabling critical thinking in her subject, but said that she worked to foster these skills in whatever way she could, "[it would] be about looking at the learning and how it reflects the individual's life and looking at it through different eyes than society has allowed you to look at it through, questioning beliefs." She does this by looking at such topics as computer viruses, online shopping and virtual communities. She also commented on how the jump from critical thinking to group action is limited by the resources available to community education.

### ***Experiential Learning***

As with the other case studies the need to make learning relevant to people's everyday lives was mentioned by both the tutor and the co-ordinator, "[The specific content for community education] is relevance to daily life... relevance to work outside or after the course is finished and relevance to communities as a whole" (tutor).

According to the tutor, trying to create relevance by having learners negotiate programme content can be a challenge, because her subject is so technical. This task is more easily accomplished in personal development programmes.

However, using the group as a resource for learning and making content relevant was seen as part of community education, "the methods that are key are learner participation and people helping each other out" (tutor). Promoting these facets ensures the development of agency for learners, "that helps when there's a group dynamic that's encouraged to take responsibility for their own actions and own learning... school has a lot to do with people developing into beings who have been told they are bad [there is] a chink of light where people get that they are actually able to achieve [then] an avalanche happens and they commit to the process" (tutor).

The past learner for the case study reflected experiencing these facets of community education. She described it as team-oriented and told how other participants had assisted her when she was not able to attend classes.

### ***Community Development and Social Action***

Blayne Blades clearly links their work to foster social change in the local area to the creation of active citizenship opportunities for learners. These kinds of opportunities, amongst others, include community gardening, the residents group, the Tidy Towns

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committee and a community network. The organisation also has an international project that works to help immigrants to access training and information provided by Blayney Blades. It also works with a number of local and national fora to effect social change, such as AONTAS, the National Collective of Community-Based Women's Networks, Justice Ireland, the Wheel, and the Social Inclusion Measures Committee.

Learners are invited to volunteer for the project and are referred to volunteer opportunities in house in IONTAS. They have, in the past, also been invited to lobby on behalf of Blayney Blades in relation to funding cuts. Both the learners described volunteering for Blayney Blades and other services in house on foot of their involvement. The tutor described the importance of community education for improving the community situation through the increase of education levels. The co-ordinator said that community education was to "give women the tools and the know-how, the opportunity to create social change within their own lives."

As with some of the other case studies the idea of taking action and becoming involved in civic life was seen to happen at the individual level as opposed to learner groups working to take action together. The tutor reflected on the challenge of implementing this radical and political view of community education, "it's kind of utopian to think that we're going to make a huge global change, but you can make a huge change to individuals' lives... in a small and personal way individuals make a difference and that difference spreads [it] may not be as obvious as it once was but it's significant."

The co-ordinator indicated that civic engagement outcomes are important for the project, but that active citizenship is considered specifically only in some courses where time and content allow. However, encouraging active citizenship is part of the ethos of the centre.

## Analysis

The following points summarise the findings from the case studies:

- Generally, all of the case study organisations appeared to implement a similar approach to community education, although the degree to which critical reflection and civic engagement were explicitly promoted differed across centres.
- All of the organisations saw their work as an educational response to disadvantage in a community.
- All the case study centres offered learners a significant amount of tailored supports to address barriers, often in a one-to-one context.
- Social recognition work was named as a crucial aspect of community education because learners lacked self-confidence and self-esteem due to disadvantage. Fostering this recognition was described as essential to the progression of learners in whatever way they chose.
- The commitment to experiential learning from all case study organisations was strong.
- The process of teaching described by the centres included a number of specific skills and qualities, including: fostering critical reflection using the Freirean process of connecting personal issues to the structures that create them; knowing the learner individually and being able to offer them tailored supports; using prior learning and life experience to make learning relevant; democratising the learning environment to foster mutual respect; understanding local community issues and requirements; fostering skills that are transferable to community development and civic engagement, and encouraging reflective thinking.
- There was a high degree of consistency between the ethos of providers and the outcomes for learners interviewed.
- Only two centres described neighbourhood work as part of their outreach work to attract learners.
- The majority of providers indicated that as part of their ethos, they encouraged individual learners into civic engagement in the form of getting involved in other local projects, volunteering for the centre itself and representing the organisation at local

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fora. Only two centres described facilitating groups of learners collectively to take action and that this was a portion of the work they do with groups.

- For some of the case studies critical reflection was described more in terms of individual reflective thinking as opposed to facilitating the learner to situate their experience within society and to critique that.
- For some, the capacity to engage learners in experiential learning, critical thinking and encouraging civic engagement was seen as contingent on the type of programme on offer.
- On the whole, providers described involvement in local and national civil society, including networks and that this participation was how they worked for social change.

### Discussion

The case studies bear out much of the literature relating to the model of community education explored in this research. It is clear that centres are implementing the key features of this model, in particular, that community education is an educational response to disadvantage.

Of note is the relationship between social recognition and progression. This finding bears out Honneth's assertion about the importance of the recognition of an individual's work at the community level. Work in this context can be understood as what the individual can give back to their community through their talents and strengths. Fostering an individual's recognition of these and their value supports them to actually move into opportunities that will assist them to contribute to their community such as education, training and employment.

It is very clear that all the providers are participating in local and national civil society to create social change. The majority hoped to begin or do already encourage learners into civic engagement and invited learners to volunteer with the organisation or other organisations locally. Only two worked with learner groups collectively to take action. There is a sense that there was potential for these centres to deal more explicitly in the learning context with the connection between critical reflection and taking action. The concept of active citizenship employed is one that is more liberal, involving voting and volunteering instead of radical action for social change within the context of a social movement.

The case studies present the range of skills that tutors/ facilitators need to have to implement the social action model of community education in the learning setting.

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These coincide with key elements of the model as set out in the introduction to this report and would be key to the development of continuing professional development for those working in the sector. These requirements would also be important competences to include in any standard qualification developed for the adult education sector if it was to prepare individuals to work in community education.

It is plain that for those learners interviewed the community education experienced had resulted in wide changes that they experienced very positively.

# 9

## CONVERSATIONS ABOUT COMMUNITY EDUCATION

This chapter presents the qualitative feedback from the four key informant interviews. These informants were individuals who could offer strategic insights about the social action model of community education (see Appendix B for a list of interviewees). Case study providers' views about the strategic environment for community education centres like those they manage are also presented. The chapter is divided into sections representing the themes that emerged from these conversations (See Appendices B and C for the interview schedules).

### COMMUNITY EDUCATION IS ABOUT SOCIAL JUSTICE

All of the interviewees described community education as a form of adult learning that was aimed at addressing inequality for disadvantaged target groups and fostering social change, "It's a very active form of education. It's education that has a strong social and political dimension, it operates at the collective level, very much concerned with trying to bring about social change. That can be very modest, at its most ideological it probably is around social transformation... very ambitious, it can be daunting because you really have to have the resources to match" (interviewee no.4).

All of the providers indicated that community education was about redressing disadvantage and they did say that they worked to contribute to local and national change as organisations linked into local and national fora. However, they did not, without prompting, indicate that community education was about learners in their learning groups taking action. Instead the majority mentioned that community education was about encouraging individuals to take part in their communities in whatever way they chose and they actively encouraged this outcome as part of their ethos.

### COMMUNITY EDUCATION HAS BEEN DILUTED

All of the interviewees indicated that the traditional understanding of community education as education for social change has been diluted and it does not happen as much as intended, "I think it's [social action] happening less than we would like it to, it is more adult education than community education... but nevertheless radical things have happened, people have done things individually and collectively not as much as we would like but it certainly is there... it has a huge impact on people's lives but it's the next bit up that doesn't seem to happen" (interviewee no.1). Another interviewee said, "there is a new abeyance, it is difficult to discern what is emancipatory about some of these centres [community education] has become watered down" (interviewee no.2).

## 9 CONVERSATIONS ABOUT COMMUNITY EDUCATION

For two of the interviewees, this situation was due to the idea that the model of women's community education, which clearly elaborates this purpose had not been fully transferred into the practice of other providers. For all of the interviewees it was clear that the space for social transformation was being squeezed by an economic agenda for adult learning and lack of resources "I think that without resources, ongoing supports, stimulus it's very hard to maintain that [radical purpose]. There is a greater need for it than ever before, but in the current climate it will not be prioritised. Lifelong learning is fading off the agenda, the progress made when times were good is being rolled back... equality agenda [there has been] a total erosion of it" (interviewee no.4).

One interviewee described the evolution of community education from support into a movement to support into courses, thus encouraging the perception of community education as merely being education based in the community.

Funding requirements were identified as a way of squeezing this space, "it is possible for a centre to have a philosophy that is overarchingly the credentialisation of education while keeping the ethos of emancipation. However, the push from Pobal and the government departments has been to try to push [out] that emancipatory agenda" (interviewee no. 2).

### THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE

All of the providers interviewed indicated the importance of their local civil societies as supportive of the work they did to effect change, but also to attract and support learners.

The majority of the interviewees indicated how important it was for a community infrastructure to support community education, "[it needs to be] joined up with other local efforts to bring about social change, it needs to be collaborative, partnership" (interviewee no.4).

One interviewee reflected that recent funding cuts to the community sector generally would weaken community education, because that infrastructure is essential to understanding community needs and targeting disadvantaged learners.

Another described the difficulty of moving learners into civic engagement and leadership, because local decision-making fora would not allow their organisation to participate in them.

## THE CHALLENGE OF CONNECTING COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT TO COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Three of the four interviewees commented on this theme and the lack of understanding of community education as learning for community development. This challenge was described in two ways. The first was in terms of a lack of understanding about the difference between the two. The second was the difficulty experienced by providers involved in community development holding the space for radical community education in the face of a trend that sees community development as social entrepreneurship, instead of assisting communities to take control of local decision-making and address disadvantage.

## VARIATION IN VEC MANAGEMENT AND SUPPORT

Three of the four interviewees also described this challenge for community education. The extent to which a social change purpose is supported differs from one VEC to the next. The role of the CEF was highlighted by one interviewee, "But if she [the CEF] doesn't see it [community education] as radical or political then it's never going to move beyond what is happening in the VEC" (interviewee no.3).

## MANAGING THE SPACE BETWEEN INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE DEVELOPMENT

All of the interviewees talked about the difficulty of respecting the needs and wishes of learners to pursue vocational/ accredited learning or just personal development, while at the same time promoting social action, "it's okay to do both [vocational and social change learning] if you are aware that one will service the other and manage the space effectively, it's a dual remit and not losing sight of that... being strategic, how can one take you to the other, it is also about being honest and courageous to say we've lost one at the expense of another... [its about] managing the opposition in a mindful way" (interviewee no.4).

This tension was evident in the way that case study providers tended to talk about encouraging individuals to take action if they so chose rather than making that aim explicit in the learning. Two of the interviewees talked about how important the role of the facilitator is in holding this space and that while a centre may have an social change ethos sometimes that does not translate into the tutoring. Facilitators trained to encourage the transformative side of community education are important to the work.

Two interviewees also acknowledged that the individual development work and process of community education is what makes it different and radical, whether learners move to action or not, "the ways in which the classes are conducted allows people to develop their voice to see each other as equally valuable to develop a body of knowledge from that group... I think the process remains the most radical part, they really do try to empower people" (interviewee no.2).

Lastly, one interviewee commented, "only a small amount [of learners] will move into community development, how you manage that process is a bit of a challenge" (interviewee no.3).

### MEASURING IMPACT

Most of the interviewees described the challenge of showing the impact of community education and how important it was to engage in this task. Two reflected on how funding providers do not want to see or encourage the measurement of outcomes "Pobal very rarely look for the impact of a programme... the method of evaluation the impact is not being collected in a way that it can lead to further development. We need to be looking more at what is the impact and what are we doing and putting it in a place that someone can learn from it" (interviewee no.3).

Another commented on the intensive nature of this project, "having ways of evaluating your impact, you need to be doing long-term longitudinal studies, following people for 10 years, it takes ages" (interviewee no.1).

### RECOGNITION AND RESOURCES

All of the case study providers indicated that a lack of recognition of community education at policy level and a lack of resources threatened its sustainability. Interviewees supported this view, "[policy-makers] need to accept community education as part of the curriculum" (case study provider).

One highlighted the resource intensive nature of community education, "It's very slow, skilled, intensive work, which requires a lot of time and money" (interviewee no.1).

All of the case study providers and one of interviewees called for ringfenced funding for community education. However, some of the interviewees cautioned against this. One felt that separate funding for community education would threaten its sustainability as

it would not be seen as part of mainstream adult education provision. Another indicated that separate funding would be suitable for larger centres that are au fait with the development and design of programmes and funding applications, but that smaller groups would have a hard time accessing this funding without the support of a VEC.

Two of the case study providers mentioned that FETAC quality assurance and the administration involved in offering accredited courses stretched the already inadequate resources of their centre. Another two said that in the current economic context, they were concerned that community education could be cut from adult education provision altogether.

### THE ROLE OF AONTAS AND THE CEN

Most of the case study providers and interviewees mentioned the importance of AONTAS or the Community Education Network (CEN) in supporting community education, "AONTAS did recognise the importance of the movement and women's community education as a movement, that was really important" (interviewee no.3).

When asked what the CEN could do to further support the sustainability of community education the most frequent response from providers was to share programme models and resources and the CEN having a regional presence around the country.

## ANALYSIS

The following points summarise the learning from the data presented in this chapter:

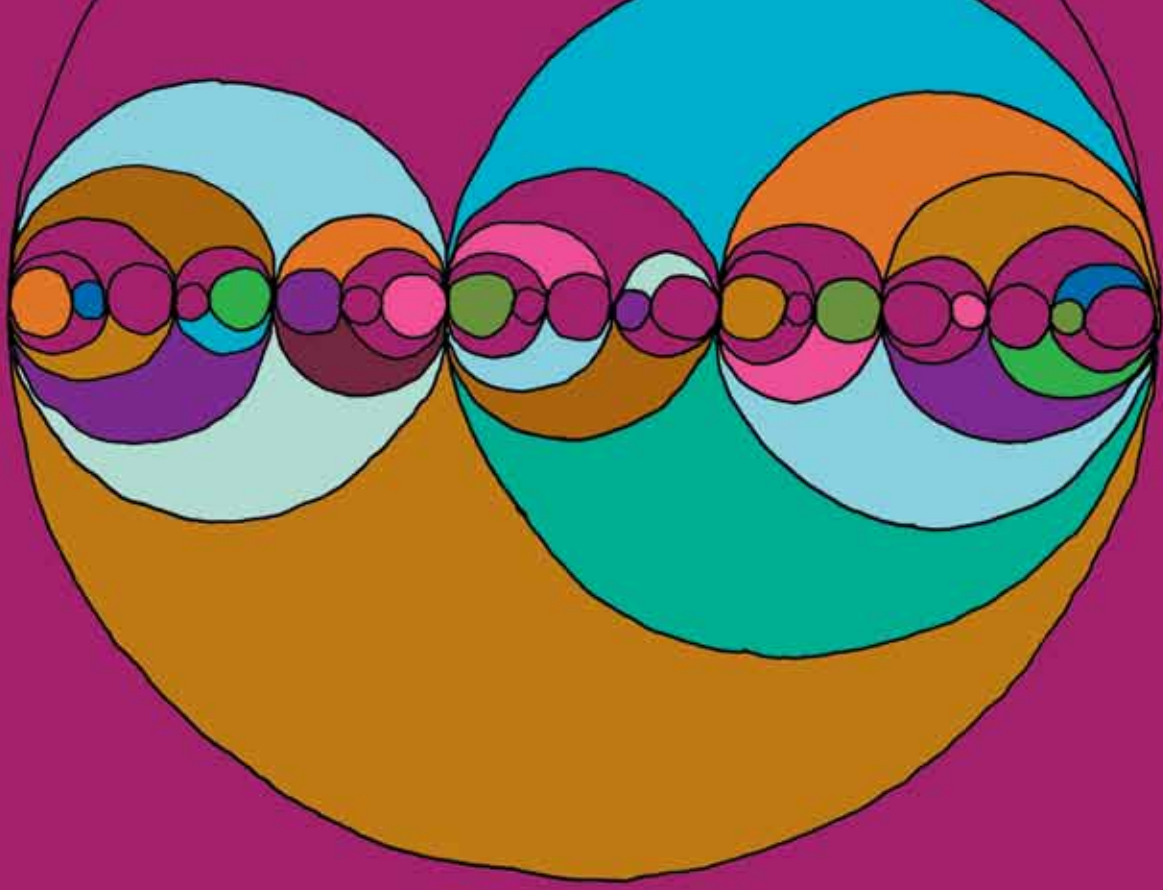
- While all the interviewees and providers described a radical purpose for community education, the data from providers shows that the work for social change appears to be carried out in terms of actual programme provision to an area and lobbying/ networking work by staff/ volunteers of the organisation. It is not necessarily understood in terms of groups of learners taking action. However, it is understood as part of a local response to disadvantage, which relies on solid community infrastructure and joint work between organisations at local level, something, which is being threatened in the current funding environment.
- The radical purpose of community education has been diluted due to an economic agenda for adult learning, and linked to this, the influence of funding providers, which renders community education as education based in the community. The implementation of community education in different VEC areas is dependent on the understanding of community education promoted within the VEC.
- There needs to be effort put into clarifying and promoting the connections and differences between community education and community development in terms of a radical purpose, versus seeing community development as wholly about the provision of services to a local area and community education as one of those services.
- Managing the space between individual and collective development is delicate and requires reflective thinking by the centre and the facilitator/ tutor. Only a small number of learners will move into community development, but the extent to which this occurs is dependent on facilitator/ tutor skills.
- The need to measure the hard and soft outcomes of community education is an ongoing requirement that is not supported through current funding programmes.
- Community education continues to lack recognition and resources, although the work of AONTAS and the CEN was acknowledged as important support for the sector. Some interviewees suggested a regional presence for the CEN. There were differing opinions about a single funding line for community education.

## DISCUSSION

The results of the interviews confirm much of what we know about the strategic environment for community education. Namely, that a service focus for community development and a human capital approach to adult learning have changed the playing field for community education. Therefore, the environment limits the potential of community education to be preparation for community development that is about people taking control of local decision-making. This situation is particularly marked in terms of a lack of resources for community infrastructure, which supports community education's potential to respond to disadvantage at the programme level, but also form part of the local networks providers to support learners into and work with to campaign for change. A lack of understanding about the link and difference between community development and community education compounds this problem.

While it would appear that community education has become a part of the adult education service, the funding available for it through VECs and the BTEI Community Strand only support programme development and not the work done with local civil society and service providers, further threatening the idea of the joined up approach mentioned above. Furthermore, some are worried that community education funding is at risk altogether.

The interviews also show that community education is still challenged, as outlined by AONTAS in 2004, by the work related to accreditation and looking for resources. They also confirm the importance of facilitator/ tutor skills in supporting learners to view their world critically and be supported into social action if they so choose. However, this aspect of community education, the interviewees say, has been diluted. This raises a question about the extent to which providers see themselves as part of social movements for change and see the role of community education, in part, to mobilise learners into those movements.



# 10 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The conclusions and recommendations from this research are set out in the sections below under relevant headings. The recommendations are directed at the AONTAS Community Education Network and interested providers and support personnel.

## **SUCCESSFUL IN REACHING DISADVANTAGED LEARNERS AND ADDRESSING EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE**

The providers in this research are successful in reaching disadvantaged learners, which is an important feature of the model of community education explored here. The research shows that certain groups, such as men, lone parents, Travellers and non-nationals are under-represented. Many of the centres were not involved in outreach work where they approached people directly in their homes or locally. The research suggests that recruitment of under-represented target groups could be improved with more intensive outreach.

It is notable that when tested for significance those with less than secondary education were more likely to indicate experiencing many of the top outcomes achieved by learners. This finding further confirms how the model of community education here works particularly well for those who have experienced educational disadvantage, an assertion made about it in the literature. It also supports Government policy about community education, which positions it as second chance learning for those experiencing educational disadvantage that can help learners progress if they so choose, which many of the cohort in this research desired. However, this work needs to be resourced, including funding for outreach work and the necessary supports to address barriers that learners face.

The recommendations arising from this conclusion are:

- Ensure ring fenced funding for intensive outreach in community education.
- Consider carrying out intensive outreach in order to attract the above named target groups into community education provided through the centres.
- Continue to promote the value and role of the social action model of community education for addressing educational disadvantage and the learning supports required.

## A SOCIAL ACTION MODEL IS EFFECTIVE

Since the DES results and the results from this research are not directly statistically comparable, this conclusion is tentative, but it would appear that aspiring to the model of community education explored in this research generally, results in somewhat more frequent attainment of the outcomes measured. As part of this model centres put in place a combination of elements, such as a range of tailored supports that are needed to remove barriers for learners, links to local civil society for referral of learners to and from programmes, and processes to identify learner and community needs.

The providers in this research were also effective at ensuring experiential learning for community education from identification of learner needs to using life experience in the learning context.

It is clear that the community education offered by the centres in this research fosters the critical voice of learners. Learners in this research experienced outcomes showing that they were encouraged to critically engage with the world around them in their group and with others and that those opinions were valued in the learning process. This conclusion is borne out, for example, by the number of people who began to discuss social or political issues with family or friends.

The research suggests that this way of working could be shared with other providers. However, it is also threatened by a lack of resources and these must be protected in the current funding environment. It would appear that in order to have community education that is preparation for community development that a separate funding line would be appropriate such that the wider work of providers, and not just programme provision could be resourced. However, this provision, if attained, carries risks for the recognition of community education and would need to be carefully managed such that it was accessible to small and larger providers.

The recommendations arising from this conclusion are:

- Continue to use the CEN as a forum for highlighting best practice.
- Lobby for ring fenced funding for community education.
- Carry out research isolating the outcomes of other models of community education for comparison.

## LACK OF SOCIAL RECOGNITION IS A FEATURE OF DISADVANTAGE THAT IS CRUCIAL TO ADDRESS

This research confirms the importance of social recognition work with those who are marginalised. The research has shown that the lack of social recognition is a feature for those experiencing marginalisation and that fostering this recognition at the level of civil society and the community is necessary for learners to become aware of the contribution they can make and to progress accordingly.

The centres participating in this research are doing this work effectively given the high frequency of positive change in relation to personal development outcomes as well as the progression outcomes noted.

The recommendation arising from this research is:

- Promote the rationale for social recognition work in community education and how this differs to other types of adult learning in terms of the target groups for community education and its aims.

## TEACHING IN COMMUNITY EDUCATION REQUIRES SPECIALIST TRAINING

The research shows how, in order to implement the elements of the social action model of community education, tutors/ facilitators require a specialist set of competences, articulated through the case studies and the results pertaining to the creation of the learning environment dealt with in the chapters setting out survey responses.

This model is only deliverable if tutors/ facilitators have the appropriate qualifications. Centres need to ensure that their tutors/ facilitators are aware of and have these competences through continuing professional development (CPD) and hiring practices. The sector could usefully promote them as an essential set for all adult educators, such that they are prepared to work in community education if they choose. A possible model for said continuing professional development could be the existing quality assurance framework for women's community education developed by AONTAS in partnership with women's community education groups<sup>84</sup> nationally. It could be adapted to ensure that it meets requirements for working with other target groups.

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84 *Flower Power: AONTAS Guide to best practice of women's community education* AONTAS: Dublin (2010)

The recommendations arising from this conclusion is:

- Factor the specific competences necessary for the social action model of community education into the continuing professional development of tutors/ facilitators and any standard qualifications for adult educators.
- Ensure that job descriptions and hiring practices encapsulate the key competences required for tutoring/ facilitating community education.
- Develop a model of CPD for the social action model of community education.

### **POSSIBILITIES FOR STRENGTHENING POTENTIAL FOR CHALLENGING SOCIAL RELATIONS AND CONNECTION TO SOCIAL MOVEMENTS**

The research suggests that there is potential for the participating centres to make a more explicit link between the critical reflection skills they foster in learners and encouragement to challenge social relations through more radical forms of active citizenship rather than just volunteering or voting. The work of the centres shows that they are sowing fertile ground to do this as many learners reflected positive change in skills for critical reflection and experienced tutors who encouraged this. What was missing, though, was explicit investigations of discrimination and presentation of alternatives to problems in communities. Also, learning clearly connected to realising social change was not significantly evident amongst providers in terms of community development, leadership or politics learning.

As the literature suggests, while the learners' decisions are paramount it is still important for providers to problematise consumer demands in light of a human capital approach to learning and present options that are in keeping with the social, cultural and economic objectives that providers want to contribute to.

This explicit linking needs to occur at two levels. The first is in the learning context and the facilitator/ tutor engaging learners in using a societal critique of their lives not just for the purpose of making individual change, but suggesting that the learner could make change at the level of the community or with other learners. The second is in providers clearly setting out the social movement/s they are connected to and how their learning works to realise them or clearly promoting the organisational ethos to learners.

## 10 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

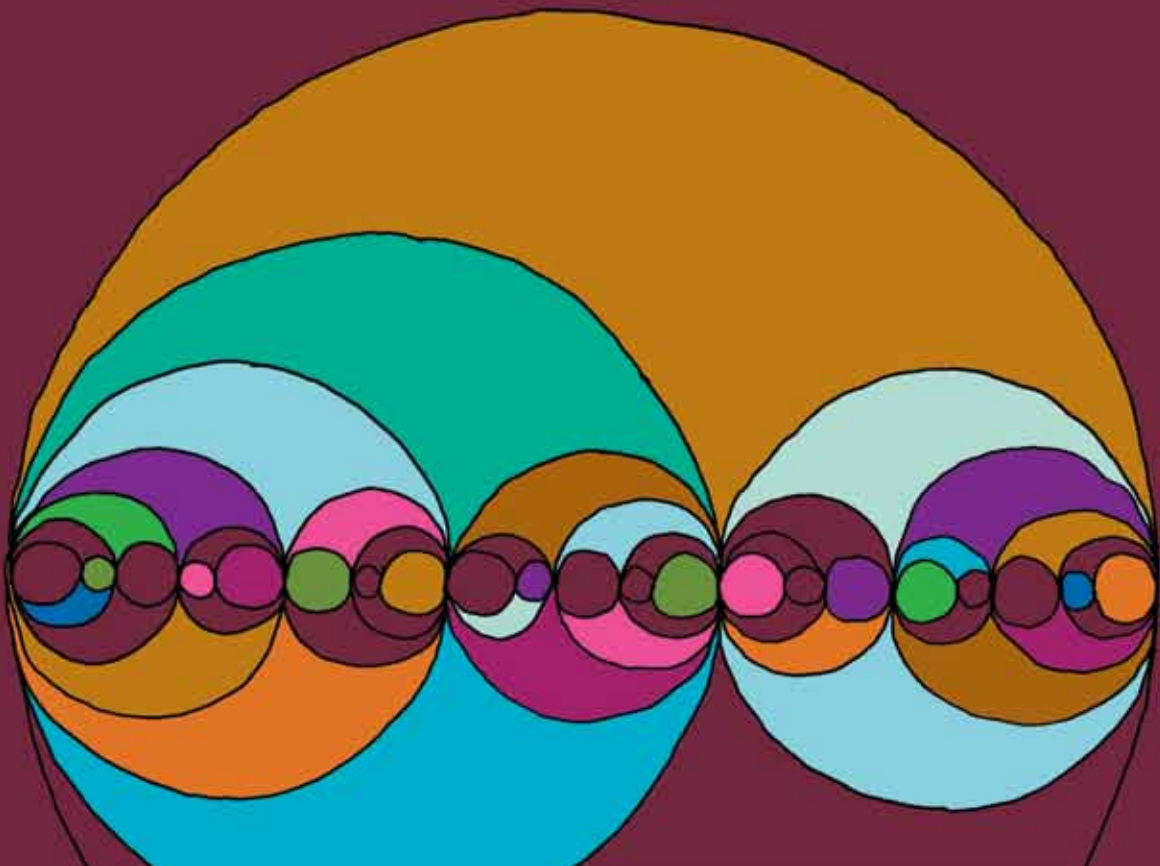
In order to do this work, providers could start or continue to mindfully discuss within the organisation the management of the opposition between individual and collective needs for the learning and the extent to which they would like to see learners becoming civically engaged or collectively working for social change.

The interview results and the literature articulated that this process takes time as the initial personal development needs of the learner must be addressed first of all before the development of critical reflection and skills for social action can commence. The results of this research are only a snapshot of a particular moment in participants' learning journeys and many were at the beginning of those journeys. In fact, in order to see the true extent of this model's potential to foster social action longitudinal research would be needed.

Further support for the need to strengthen the social change potential in community education was again outlined in the strategic interviews, which called for the need to foster an increased understanding of the link between community development and community education.

The recommendations arising from this conclusion are:

- Ensure all facilitators/ tutors are trained and facilitated by their centre to understand and make explicit this link between critical reflection and social action.
- Reflect on the connections between community education and community development and how it can contribute to local people taking control over decision-making in communities and redistributing resources.
- Reflect on the challenges involved in balancing the opposition between individual and collective needs for the learning in community education and the extent to which providers would like to see learners become involved in social change.
- If social change is part of the ethos of a provider, ensure that this ethos is promoted by tutors/ facilitators to learners.
- Carry out longitudinal research about the outcomes of the social action model of community education to give a more accurate assessment of its capacity to foster participation in community development and social action for learners.



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# 12 APPENDIX A

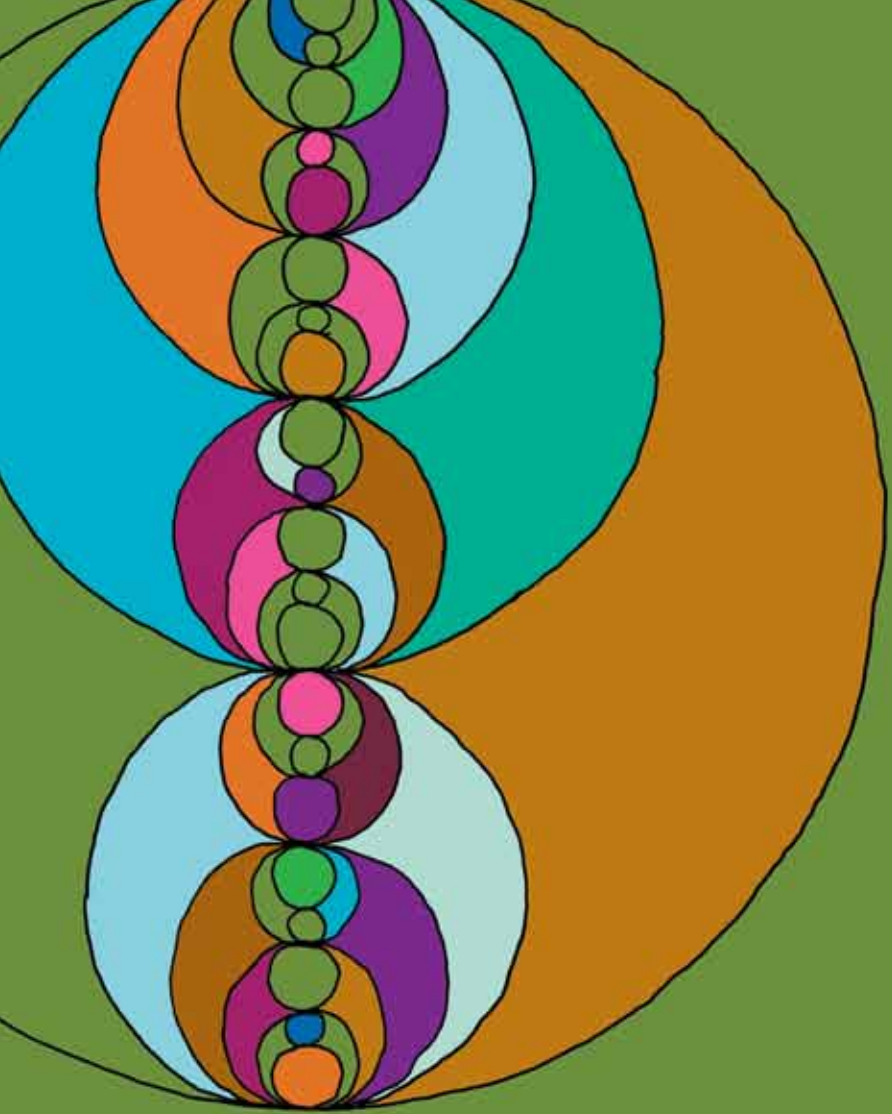
## RESEARCH ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Groups who wished to participate in the research self-assessed using the following criteria to assess if they were eligible for the research. If a group could answer 'yes' to each statement below, then they were eligible to participate in the research.

	Yes	No
1. The group/ centre currently has an independent management committee/ board of management (if you are a CDP and are being amalgamated with a partnership but your BOM has not yet been dissolved you can tick 'yes').		
2. The group/ centre aspires to the Community Education Network definition of community education (see definition below).		
3. The group/ centre carries out consultations with learners and needs analyses to inform the development and delivery of community education.		
4. The group/ centre was started by a member or members of the community (i.e. not a service coming into the community to start a project/ initiative).		
5. The group or centre takes an area-based approach, seeking to address the needs of a geographical community.		
6. The organisation sees community education as, potentially, preparation for community development and also works to foster the individual development of learners too.		
7. The group/ centre can provide some data on the number of learners, and the courses offered		
8. The group/ centre identifies as a community education provider.		

The CEN definition of community education:

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



# 13 APPENDIX B

## CASE STUDY QUESTIONS FOR MANAGERS

### ***Profile of Organisation***

1. Can you give me a brief history of this organisation/ group, why it was started and how it has developed to the present day?
2. What are the key social inclusion/ local issues your organisation/ group responds to?
3. Who are your courses for?
4. I am going to through a checklist of things to see if you can give me any information on them. Some of these things may be documented, but if not estimates or your description of them is fine (go through the checklist).

### ***Community Education***

1. Can you tell me, from the perspective of this group/ organisation, what community education is all about?
2. How if at all, do you work to create social change that combats disadvantage in your local area?
3. How, if at all, do you work to create social change that combats disadvantage at a national level?
4. What type of experience would you like each and every learner who attends here to have?
5. How would you describe the relationship that you would like to see between tutor/ facilitator and learners here?
6. How should learning happen in the courses put on here – ie methodology?
7. What are the key skills, qualities and qualifications that you want tutors who facilitate here to have?
8. How do you ensure that everyone who works/ volunteers here takes the approach to community education you embrace? What are the challenges to that?

***Learner/ Community Outcomes***

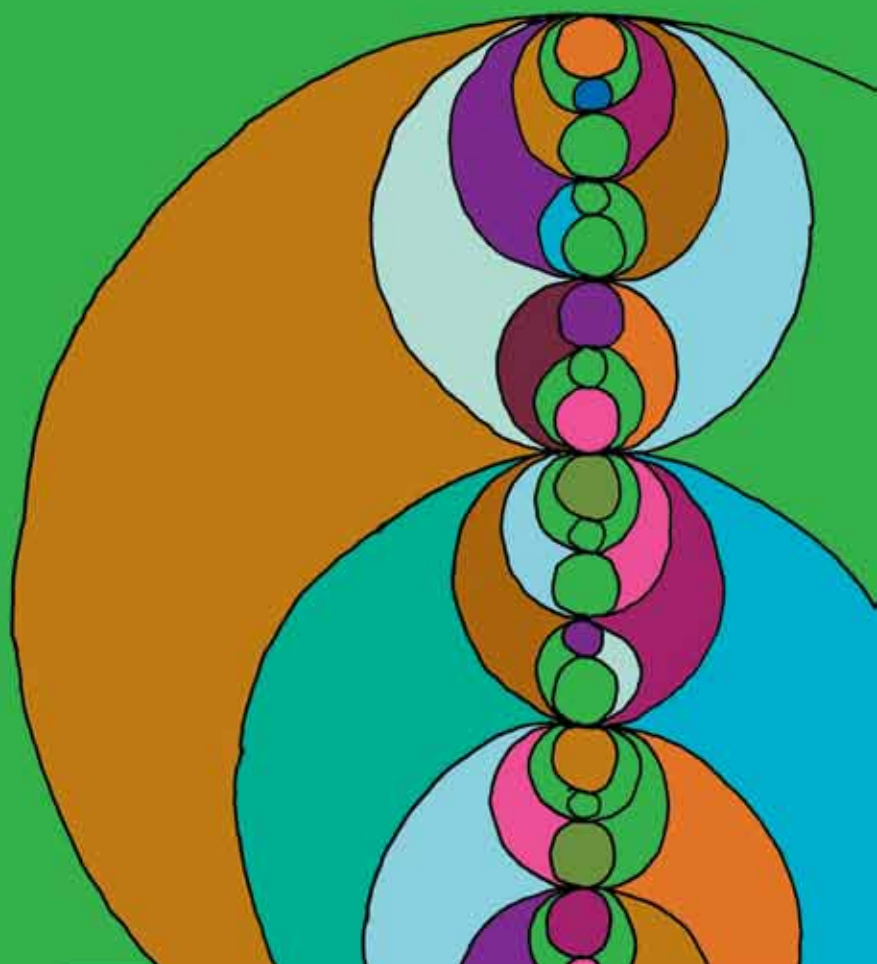
1. How do you define progression in this centre/ group?
2. From an organisational perspective, would you hope that learners would increase their participation in political activities as a result of their experience here? Please explain your answer.
  - a. Repeat for civic activities; social activities; health behaviour; beliefs about the self; labour market progression; further education and training.
3. In terms of civic and political engagement outcomes – how, if at all, do you foster these outcomes for learners?
4. Is the development of self esteem a key outcome for you? If yes – why is it so important to develop this in learners in community education?
5. Can you give me any examples of learners taking collective action to address community issues?
6. Where does the provision of vocational training fit into your approach to community education?

***Attracting and Retaining Learners***

1. How do you target and attract learners to your programmes?
2. Can you tell me about the outreach you engage in, if any, as part of the work to attract learners?
3. How do you retain learners?
4. What kind of challenges do you encounter in relation to these areas of work?
5. Are there things that you would like to provide for learners but your funding does not allow it (salaries for staff, childcare, provide room, etc)?

***Operational Environment***

1. What supports do you find most beneficial in your operating environment?
2. What are the key challenges or threats facing you from the operational environment?
3. What do you think needs to happen in order to ensure that community education is sustainable in Ireland?
4. How, if at all, could the CEN support the sustainability of the community education?  
What direction should its work take?
5. What are the challenges, if any, that you are facing in terms of FETAC accreditation?



# 14 APPENDIX C

## STRATEGIC INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. From your perspective, what is community education all about?
2. What is the purpose of community education in Ireland?
3. How if at all, do you think the practice and provision of community education has evolved over the last ten to twenty years.
4. AONTAS describes community education as radical and political and as preparation for collective action. To what extent is community education in Ireland implementing those facets?
5. Is there a place/ need for radical and political community education in Ireland currently? Please explain your response.
6. Are there differences between different means of provision (ie those centres that are dedicated community education centres and carry out community development work versus other means)? Please explain your answer.
7. In those community education centres that also carry out community development work, what do you think their contribution is to community and social change in Ireland (is community education part of a movement for social change)?
8. What key challenges do you think these types of centres face in their work?
9. How would you address each challenge identified?
10. What has been the impact of the cohesion process on community education centres?
11. Many of the kinds of centres that we are talking about provide vocational training. How does this type of provision fit into radical and political community education?
12. What kinds of developments/ supports/ programmes have been key to the development of community education and why?
13. Should there be a separate funding programme for community education administered directly from a Government Department? Please give reasons for your answers.
14. Are there any questions that I have not asked that you think it would be important to ask?

The interviewees for this research were:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Role</b>
Brid Connolly	Lecturer – BA, Dip Ad&ComEd, MA (Equality Studies), MEd (Lifelong Learning), Ed.D – NUI Maynooth
Bernie McDonnell	Programme Manager, Equality Programmes, Pobal
Tess Murphy	CEO, Longford Women's Link
Crona Gallagher	Adult Education Officer, Donegal Vocational Education Committee



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