

CORK CITY LEARNING FORUM

Report Of Plenary Meeting, 12 October 2004



2005 DIARY DATES

- 7/8 – 9 March:** *Discovery 2005* – Interactive Science & Technology Exhibition, City Hall
- 7 – 10 April:** 2005 *Cork Lifelong Learning Festival*, venues throughout the city

1. REPORTS FROM WORKING GROUPS

a) Lifelong Learning Festival – *Tina Neylon, Festival Development Officer (on behalf of the Lifelong Learning Working Group)*

Tina Neylon reported on the first **Cork Lifelong Learning Festival**, which had taken place on **7-8 May 2004**. The aim of this first festival was to promote and celebrate learning in all its forms. Learning providers and groups had responded enthusiastically to the festival and over 65 free events had taken place throughout the city. The variety of events was reflected in the breadth of organisations participating – 6 community education networks, further and higher education, schools, sporting bodies, libraries, training institutes to name just a few. The festival programme included exhibitions, tours, workshops, demonstrations and talks – with a strong focus on participation. Venues included shopping centres, libraries and community centres as well as galleries, arts spaces and other centres of learning. The “switch onto computers” element saw over 11 centres in the city provide free, drop in access and support for computer beginners. The festival finale was a concert in city hall performed entirely by learners.

A lot had been achieved within a tight timescale for the first festival. Media coverage had been particularly successful, including four pages and the cover of the Examiner weekend supplement.

Planning was already underway for the **2005 festival**, which has been extended to 4 days and will take place from **Thursday 7 to Sunday 10 April**. All those who participated this year will be invited to consider how they might participate in 2005. The focus for the 2005 festival will be to increase the geographical spread of events and support more participative events, involve those groups underrepresented in 2004, and raise public awareness of the festival through a major marketing campaign.

b) Discovery 2005 – An Interactive Science & Technology Exhibition

Presentation by Liam Hogan, IITD, on behalf of the Economic Aspects of Learning working group

The organisation of a science and technology exhibition was a key action identified by the economic working group following its conference in November 2003 which considered what could be done locally to promote science. Since the last plenary meeting the group had developed a proposal and secured funding from the Discover Science and Engineering Programme to develop the event. Matching funding will be provided from local partners and the private sector.

The aim of the event is to:

- Provide a stimulating environment in which children can discover science, technology and engineering

- Stimulate increased interest in science, engineering and technology among both children and parents
- Raise awareness of their importance to the local economy
- Present science, technology and engineering as bona fide cultural activities during Cork 2005 Capital of Culture

The event will take place from **7/8 – 9 March 2005**, and take place in **City Hall**. Attendance will be free and visits will be scheduled from local primary and secondary schools during the day. It is also hoped that the exhibition would be open to the public for at least one evening. A project co-ordinator is currently being recruited.

It is envisaged that content will include:

- an exhibition of selected projects from Cork students who participated in the 2005 Esat Young Scientist competition,
- an interactive science, engineering and technology zone with interactive displays specially hired for the event
- children's workshops, eg Drawbots where children build robots
- Leonardo – the marriage of art and science (A display of Leonardo da Vinci's inventions) in association with The Ark Cultural Centre for Children
- Interactive displays from 3rd level R&D projects and industry

c) Mature Students in Further and Higher Education in Cork

Presentation by Elmarie McCarthy, Cork City Development Board on behalf of the Access/Participation Working Group

Following a meeting of the working group this report had been finalised but was still awaiting comments from some of the participating organisations. Once these have been received the report will be circulated to all Forum members.

Some of the key findings in the report were:

- The relatively high proportion of mature students in further education (from 35% to 81%)
- Participation rates in higher education were increasingly slightly but still well short of the 15% target for 2005
- The lack of formal mechanisms to gather data regarding mature disadvantaged students (despite fact that this is one of the NAPS targets for higher education)
- Importance of designing courses in partnership with groups working with disadvantaged adults
- Lack of formal written procedures regarding the recruitment of mature students
- The importance of word of mouth and of local links in reaching out to mature students

Suggestions to improve participation included:

- More flexible provision (timing, location and format)
- More feeder and sampler courses
- Provision of financial and other supports
- Need for a more proactive approach to stimulate demand – this should be across the institution and not confined to particular departments or courses
- More outreach and development of closer links with local communities and between further and higher education
- Improved dissemination of information

In seeking to promote the participation of mature disadvantaged students there is a need for a proactive approach to attracting such students, rather than simply seeking to accommodate them. This could be done by engaging with groups and support structures so as to investigate their needs and develop specific initiatives.

In the discussion which followed this presentation, it was pointed out that some of these issues were now being addressed in the context of the plan being developed by the National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education. The OECD report on higher education had also commented on the lack of policies for mature students.

2. **KEYNOTE PRESENTATIONS**

“Community Education – A Vision for Cork”

Presentation by Mary Kelly, Liz Buttimer and Martina Cusack, Mayfield Community Adult Learning Project, representing Mayfield Community Education Network and City of Cork Community Education Forum

(see Appendix II for full presentation)

Starting the presentation Mary Kelly gave an overview of community education, looking at various definitions, and the types of community education learners and providers. Community education respects the needs of each individual learner, and focusses on those who most need the service, eg those with no formal qualifications, the socially excluded and people with very low self-confidence. Community education takes a learner-centred approach to adult education and offers a key re-entry point to further education through informal learning in local venues.

She went on to outline a vision of community education in Cork. Key elements include:

- A range of courses at different levels responding to local needs
- Education process which respects where local people are at
- Courses linked and integrated with local community education providers and with other citywide education provision
- Focussed on those who most need the service
- Accessible with barriers to participation removed
- Tutors include past participants recruited locally if possible
- Sector has active voice and representation in policy making

Liz Buttimer then outlined the current situation of community education in Cork. A wide range of courses are available, including first step entry level courses, developed in response to local needs. While approaches vary depending on the provider, a learner-centred approach is common to all. New initiatives are however limited by funding shortages, and budgets are short term and insecure. Ten community education networks are in place across the city and these work to plan local provision, identify gaps and integrate courses and progression routes.

Some partnerships have been developed with FE and HE providers, eg progression routes, information sessions and some mixed use of venues. Services are succeeding in reaching those most in need as relationships and trust have been developed locally – yet a large number of potential participants are still not being reached. Despite the removal of certain barriers to participation, eg no fees, access is still hampered by issues such as lack of childcare facilities and formal guidance. Through the community education networks the sector is represented on a number of structures, such as the Learning Forum and the VEC Adult Learning Board.

Some of the key challenges which face the sector in moving towards the vision outlined above are the need to secure long term funding, core staff, increase the availability of courses, more tutor training, reaching out to those hardest to reach and additional resources to remove the barriers which remain to participation.

Ending the presentation Martina Cusack gave a learner perspective, outlining her experience of learning through Mayfield CALP.

Speaking after the presentation Forum Chair Mr Langford commented that the networks were partnerships to achieve “learner centredness”. Cork was pushing out the boundaries in this regard and the networks needed to be resourced. He commented that while the group process was as important as accreditation that sometimes accreditation was important for recognising and valuing the learning.

“An Information Communications Technology (ICT) Plan for Cork”

Presentation by Patrick Ledwidge, Director of Services – Community & Enterprise, Cork City Council

(see Appendix III for full presentation)

Pat Ledwidge gave an overview of ICT plan which Cork City Council was developing for the city. The aim was to make Cork an “e-enabled” city – ie one where as many people as possible are able to access services on-line. He outlined the benefits of this new technology to service providers, businesses and local communities. He predicted that in the short term the ability to navigate on-line could become a basic literacy standard, alongside reading and writing. It was therefore critical that in developing such services the ICT plan for Cork should also seek to bridge the “digital divide”.

The initial focus of the ICT plan would be on education (ie enabling people to get on-line) and on content. In developing the plan the City Council was eager to work with the Learning Forum, to identify current provision and gaps, and ensure that the proposals

meet real local needs. As a first step in this process workshops at today's plenary would make proposals to input to the plan.

2 key questions were addressed in the working groups:

- What are the ICT needs of the general public, and what groups are in most need of targeted training?
- How can programmes be developed to meet these needs?

3. FEEDBACK FROM WORKSHOP DISCUSSIONS

a) Facilitator: Elmarie McCarthy

An initial discussion amongst participants highlighted the range of provision already available locally – from basic to advanced IT training at the FAS training centre, introductory lessons to computers and driving theory courses at community level, provision for secondary school students and evening classes in schools, and clubs for the elderly.

The people most in need of training were:

- People with no computers at home
- People who do not use computers at work
- Older people
- Some teachers
- Long-term unemployed people

In developing new programmes it was essential to bring provision out to people, and not rely on training in schools. Libraries were suggested as a less threatening venue – people could drop by and take a look. Training must be available locally, daytime and nighttime, and must be uncomplicated.

However, before promoting training it was essential to first make services and training relevant to people. The key issue was to make people *want* to use computers. There was a need to remove the culture of fear of computers and to actively promote it to people – convince them of the value of ICT and clearly demonstrate why people need to use on-line services. Children were a possible incentive – many parents wanted to learn about computers so they could monitor children's use of computers.

Some questioned whether such services were relevant to all groups in society. There was also a need to give people confidence that on-line dealings, correspondence by e-mail etc will have the same weight as traditional correspondence.

Some suggestions included:

- engaging with shops in order to link computer sales with information on training opportunities (eg parents buying computers for their children would find out about training)

- the City Council should make a facility available in its offices through which people can access services
- courses should be structured around practical uses of computers, eg with lessons on how to pay bills, book holidays etc. This flexible structure could allow people to opt in and out according to their own interests and concerns

b) Facilitator: Michael O'Brien

The group felt that there were two over riding issues that needed to be addressed to encourage increased use of ICT.

- Access to hardware – people currently do not have adequate access to computers. Community facilities are over-subscribed and are not able to fully cater for demand. The cost of purchasing computers is prohibitive for many.
- The language used to describe ICT can often act as a deterrent to people who may wish to develop ICT skills. When discussing ICT and related areas language should be as simple as possible.

The group then identified priority target groups for ICT training and the type of training courses which would be most suitable for those groups.

Unemployed Men

- Training should be seen as a labour market intervention, the focus should be on accredited courses which will allow participants to access the labour market or to progress to further training/education courses.
- This is a difficult target group to reach as there is often a resistance to participating in training course.
- The venue in which training is provided also needs to be appropriate. The use of schools for example can be offputting or those who had negative experiences of school.

Parents of School Children

- Emphasis should be on e-mail and internet training and basic word processing skills.
- Many parents wish to assist children with homework and may need to access the internet to do this. Schools are also increasingly using e-mail to correspond with parents and some parents may end up being excluded if they do not have necessary skills.

People with Disabilities

- Access is the key issue for this group. Many centres that provide training are currently not accessible; a Greater availability of online training courses would partially address this issue, however this should not be seen as the entire solution as

people with disabilities have a right to access services in the same way as everybody else.

- Disability groups also have a role to play and should be more proactive in working with training providers in designing courses for their members.

Early School Leavers

- The first priority should be to get people comfortable with computers. Computers can appear as a boring option for people of this age and training needs to be made attractive. Innovative approaches should be used to attract people e.g. the use of games, mobile phone technology, music downloads etc.
- Need to be targeted early as the older they get the more removed from the education system they become and the more difficult it is to engage them in any type of training or education.
- As with unemployed men the venue in which training is provided needs to be appropriate. Using venues such as Internet cafes may make training more attractive.

Single Parents

- Training should be geared towards assisting people to get jobs or access further training/education.
- One of the main barriers to single parents participating in training/education courses is the lack of childcare. Where childcare has been made available the level of participation by single parents has risen considerably.

c) Facilitator: Pat Ledwidge

Barriers to the increased provision and take up of ICT training included:

- Reluctance to admit they do not use the technology
- Need for keyboard skills for email
- Lack of access to computers
- Funding
- Shortage of tutors – the FETAC system puts a lot of work on tutors
- Payment for online transactions – many people in the target group do not have credit cards
- Current teaching materials are not suitable – set at too high a level

Groups which should be particularly targeted for training include:

- Participants and tutors in literacy skills courses
- People aged over 30
- Parents with PCs at home that are not used
- Young males in the workplace

- People with limited access
- Distance learning opportunities are needed for those who cannot leave their homes
- People with mental health issues

Suggestions for the way forward included:

- Introduction of courses like “Computers for the terrified”
- Development of keyboard skills
- Courses must have quick wins
- Appropriate pupil:tutor ratios – 12:1 works well and 6:1 is needed where there are literacy issues
- Tutors need to have people skills
- Training should be provided for approximately 2 hours per week with access to computers available between lessons
- Need to demonstrate the advantages to prospective participants
- Need to look at the courses which are already in place, and those places where computers are already located (eg libraries, schools, community centres)
- Workplace needs can motivate learners
- Delivery modes could include community education networks and NTDI mobile unit

4. CLOSING COMMENTS

Closing the meeting Forum Chair Mr Richard Langford reminded delegates that membership of the working groups was open and that others within their organisations might be interested in participating.

APPENDIX I: LIST OF DELEGATES ATTENDING FORUM

NAME	ORGANISATION
Barrett, Denis	City of Cork VEC
Burns, Bob	Community Forum
Buttimer, Liz	Mayfield Community Education Network
Cadogan, Gemma	Cork Local Youth Voluntary Committee
Corcoran, John	Dept of Education and Science, Regional Office
Cusack, Martina	Mayfield Community Education Network
Duggan, Ita	Shandon/Cathedral/Blackpool Education Network
Flahive, Ben	Garda Siochana
Geaney, Eileen	Farranree Education Network
Harrington, Patricia	Enable Ireland
Hogan, Liam	Irish Institute of Training & Development
Kelly, Mary	Mayfield Community Education Network
Langford, Richard	City of Cork VEC
Ledwidge, Pat	Cork City Council/Cork City Development Board
Lenihan, Mary	Cork City Partnership
Loughrey, Rebecca	Southern Health Board
Lynch, Ciarán	ABLES Literacy Scheme
Lynch, Jennifer	National Adult Literacy Authority
Mc Auliffe, Willie	National Association Of Principals and Deputies
McCarthy, Dearbhail	IBEC
McCarthy, Elmarie	Cork City Development Board
McCarthy, Margaret	St Patrick's Primary School

NAME	ORGANISATION
Moloney, Rosalie	Joint Managerial Board/Association of Management of Catholic Secondary Schools
Neylon, Tina	Lifelong Learning Festival
Ní Bhaoill, Fiodhna	Irish Primary Principals Network
O'Brien, Michael	Cork City Council/Cork City Development Board
O' Shea Geraldine	Dept. of Social & Family Affairs
Payne, Charles	Ashton School
Quinlan, Carmel	University College Cork
Rigney, Tom	Cork Institute of Technology
Ryan, Helen	Terence McSwiney College
Wallace, Margaret	NTDI
White, Geraldine	FAS

APPENDIX II: Presentation by Mary Kelly, Liz Buttimer & Martina Cusack

Community Education – a vision for Cork

Liz Buttimer, Mary Kelly and Martina Cusack, of Mayfield CALP representing Mayfield Community Education Network and City of Cork Community Education Forum

Introduction

- Description
- Vision
- Current Situation
- Challenges

Community Education – Description

- Varying definitions, see White Paper on Adult Education, Learning for Life, 2000
- Community based, focussed on local area
- Adult Education, wide variety of topics
- Wide variety of providers of courses

Community Education learners

- Focussed on those who most need service, including those:
 - Educationally disadvantaged
 - No formal qualifications
 - Socially Excluded
 - Many years out of education
 - Very low self-confidence
- Often includes mix of local people
- Each individual learners needs respected

Community Education Service Providers can be:

- Community Adult Education Projects
- Family Resource Centres
- Community-based Adult Literacy Centres
- Community Development Projects
- Centres working with educationally disadvantaged adults
- Centres working with unemployed people
- Centres working with people with disabilities
- Centres working with elderly/ retired people
- Community Arts Centres.....

Context

Lifelong Learning and Community Education – how are the concepts linked?

Community Education recognised as a defined sector within the education system, by the DES in Learning for Life White Paper, 2000.

Distinguished from other forms of education because of its distinct approaches to learner centred adult education.

Offers a key re-entry point through informal learning in local venues to further educational opportunities
Particularly successful approach for those who have had negative experiences of initial education, have literacy needs, or very low self confidence.

Vision.....

Informed and driven by local experience as expressed by:
participants (learners)
service providers (FRC, CDP... etc.)
funders (City of Cork VEC...)
National Adult Ed. Organisations (AONTAS)
Dept. of Education and Science (White Paper)

Key Elements of Vision....

- Range of courses at different levels responding to needs
- Education process respects where local people are at
- Courses linked and integrated with local comm ed. providers
- Linked and integrated with to other ed. providers city-wide
- Focussed on those who most need service
- Accessible
- Barriers to participation removed
- Tutors include past participants recruited locally if possible
- Sector has active voice and representation in policy making

Range of courses:

- First step, basic, entry level courses, offering progression
- Community based courses offering certification
- Community based Outreach centres for Further and Higher Ed. providers
- Courses at all levels developed in response to local needs

Education process and funding structures

- 3 stages in process:
First step hand holding
Maintenance and support
Close down of group and progression explored
- Methodologies: Group process is as important than syllabus or accreditation
- Recommends a separate, streamlined, long term budget line, as a "provider in its own right"

Courses linked and integrated with local comm ed. Providers

- Local area based networks of comm. Ed. providers
- Local area based planning
- Integration of courses and progression routes
- Local decision making re: best use of available resources

Courses linked and integrated to city-wide ed. Provision

- Progression routes established with Formal Education providers

- Information sessions on progression options delivered in community venues
- Use of both community and formal ed. venues and facilities as appropriate
- Supportive environment for mature students entering further ed. centres

Focussed on those who most need service

Target groups:

- DES policy: Those without upper second level education
- National Development Plan policy to reach those experiencing Social Exclusion eg. Long term unemployed, Travellers, People with disabilities, Lone parents.....

Accessible with barriers to participation removed

- Ongoing Outreach to people previously excluded
- People know where and how to access courses and services appropriate to needs
- Guidance freely available to assist decisions
- Fees should not be seen by participants to be a barrier
- Childcare, incl. Drop-In, available if needed
- Disability access available if needed
- Welcome and supportive learning environment
- Any other learning need catered for eg guidance

Tutors include past participants recruited locally if possible

- Proactive recruitment of local people who have skills and experience to offer as tutors
- Tutor training and ongoing professional skills development available in a flexible manner
- Opportunities available to flexibly work towards recognised educational qualifications
- Tutor Network established as a support mechanism for professional development
- Sector has active voice and representation in policy making
- Representative structures established and working, providing a voice for Community Education providers, tutors and learners
- Active involvement in Educational Policy-making fora at VEC, and other levels
- Involvement in community fora including City Development Board structures

Community Education in Cork - Current Situation

Range of courses:

- First step, basic, entry level courses, offering progression well developed, largely funded through VEC
- Community based courses offering certification developed to some centres, funded through Partnership and VEC
- Outreach centres for Further and Higher Ed. providers in few communities
- Courses developed in response to local needs, but new initiatives and new centres limited by funding shortages

Education process and funding structures

- Range of approaches reflecting range of providers

- Each provider has own philosophy influenced by philosophy of umbrella organisation, for the majority of providers community education is a small aspect of their services
- Common element among providers is a general Learner-centred approach to courses
- VEC and Partnership fund part-time hours directly to providers.
- National pressures mean that budgets remain insecure and short-term

Courses linked and integrated with local comm ed. Providers

- 9 Local area based networks of comm. Ed. providers and 1 city-centre/ city-wide network established
- Local area based planning of elements of the service in all 10 networks
- Integration of courses and progression routes strong in some networks
- Local decision making capacity being developed through network allocation of Partnership and VEC "RAPID" hours

Community Education Networks (10)

Knocknaheeny; Churchfield; Farranree; Cathedral/Shandon/Blackpool; The Glen; Mayfield; Togher/Ballyphehane; Mahon; Bishopstown; City Centre, City-wide

Networks - Functions.....

Each Network holds regular meetings to:

- Exchange information;
- Plan joint open days;
- Nominate a representative to the Forum;
- Resolve identifiable gaps on the educational landscape;
- Recommend measures to avoid duplication and make best use of resources;
- Promote best practice in adult community education;
- Develop area based plans for presentation to the Community Education Forum

Courses linked and integrated to city-wide ed. provision

- Some successful progression routes established with Formal Education providers
- Limited number of information sessions on progression options delivered by some FE and HE providers in community venues
- Some mixed use of venues and facilities between Comm Ed and FE/HE providers. Limited by capacity in many cases
- Where strong partnerships exist, a supportive environment for mature students entering further ed. centres is in place, much more work in partnership could be done

Focussed on those who most need service

Current success in reaching those who most need the service is as a result of:

- Community based providers knowledge of the local situation;
- These providers already having trust built up with many local people in the target groups;
- This relationship can be a foundation to encourage and support people whose confidence is low to participate;

- Providers already satisfying the targetting and social inclusion requirements of core-funders, eg. ADM, DES BTEI prog., DSFA, SHB, RAPID etc.

Methods for recording and tracking limited by perceived threat to trust and confidentiality and resources.

Large numbers of potential participants still not reached. Eg. 50+% leave school under 15 in Mayfield each year!

Accessible with barriers to participation removed

- Course Information provided by Open Days
- Outreach very limited because of lack of core staff
- Mayfield CEN Research shows target group often do not know where and how to access courses or services
- Very limited if any formal guidance available
- Fees for entry level to community education should not be a barrier, target group should be made aware of this
- Childcare, esp. Drop-In not available in most cases
- Disabled access often not available
- Welcome and supportive environment a general priority

Sector has active voice and representation in policy making

- Representative structures established through networks to the following:
City of Cork VEC Adult Education Board and the Community Education Forum
Cork City Learning Forum and the Cork City of Learning Steering Committee
- Time commitment mostly voluntary
- Structure and representation as follows:

Challenges and Opportunities to move towards the Vision

- Maintaining and developing current situation
- Comm Ed has achieved a lot with minimal resources - Need for long-term secure funding of community education groups
- Need for core staff for co-ordination, outreach, support, progression, accreditation and quality
- Need resources to remove barriers to participation
- Further increase range /levels of courses
- Ensure coherence between service providers and their courses and levels
- Become involved in discussions to explore opportunities provided by National Framework of Qualifications
- Continue the support and development of Networks while avoiding "meeting overload"
- Tutor Training particularly for experienced tutors who do not possess formal qualifications eg.VEC course, formally recognised qualifications
- Reaching very hard to reach groups

APPENDIX III: Presentation by Patrick Ledwidge, Cork City Council

Information Communications Technology (ICT)

E Services - getting people on-line

Public Services - potential but those most likely to use them are least likely to be intensive technology users

Digital Divide - capability and access

Training - available for everybody

ICT Plan

- Cork Information Technology and Telecommunications Strategy (CITTS) - Prepared in 2003-4
- www.corkcity.ie/CITTS
- Priority Actions
- Cork City ICT Plan to implement

ICT Plan

- Cork as an e-enabled city
- Benefits of technology to both business and local communities - issue of basic standard
- User perspective on ICT
- Applications of the technology rather than the technology itself
- Initial focus on Education and Content
- Set of detailed proposals to be prepared - current provision
- Wish to maintain link to Cork City Learning Forum through an existing Working Group