

## **CORK CITY LEARNING FORUM**

*Inaugural Meeting, 28 January 2003*

### **Proceedings**

#### **Opening Remarks: Mr Richard Langford, CEO City of Cork VEC**

As Chair of the inaugural meeting, Mr Langford welcomed participants to the first meeting of the Cork City Learning Forum. He pointed to the variety of government departments involved in learning and providing supports for learning, and the consequent need for joined up government in this regard. The Forum could provide a vehicle through which this "joining up" could be paralleled locally, bringing together those involved in learning, both formal and non formal, at a local level. He stressed that the Forum was intended to be inclusive, and would focus on facilitating collaboration – not supplanting the work of other groups. He argued that while policy is set at national level, in realising policy local actors can push out the boundaries.

#### **What is the Cork City Learning Forum? Pat Ledwidge, Director of Services – Community & Enterprise, Cork City Council**

Mr Ledwidge explained that the impetus for creating a City Learning Forum arose from consultations during the preparation of the CDB strategy for the economic, social and cultural development of Cork City. This highlighted the need to harness local expertise at city level and to provide a forum in which all stakeholders could meet. A number of objectives were identified for the Forum:

- To promote Cork as a City of Learning
- To facilitate better dialogue and communication between all learning stakeholders in the City
- To facilitate the collection and analysis of data
- To facilitate project and strategy development
- To develop a Cork City Learning Framework to enable people to map progression routes and plan learning
- To monitor all education and training actions within the Integrated Strategy on behalf of the CDB, and provide advice as requested to the Board and other interest groups.

He noted that similar collaborative structures were proposed in a number of other city and county strategies, and welcomed representatives from the Cork County Forum. He concluded by arguing that the Forum must focus its efforts and that while resources were limited, good ideas and rigorous analysis, combined with proactive members, would attract resources to the Forum's projects.

### **KEYNOTE ADDRESS**

**Professor Áine Hyland, Professor of Education and Vice-President of UCC, Chair of the Educational Disadvantage Committee**

*(see also attached copy of Professor Hyland's presentation)*

Professor Hyland began by highlighting the changing context in which education and training was developing, with increased recognition of importance of lifelong learning and a focus on meeting the needs of a knowledge society. The National Development Plan reflected this new policy context, both in its specific objectives around education and training, and its investment focus (ie on early school leaving and increased second level retention, third level access, wider adult and second chance education opportunities, RTD, the national qualifications framework, and supporting the requirements of the labour market).

She highlighted the individual and social costs of educational failure. An adult with no educational qualifications is 9 times more likely to be unemployed than someone with third level education – yet the cost to the state of educating a third level graduate is more than twice that of educating an early school leaver. Pointing to the variety of organisations and structures involved in education, training and learning at a local, regional and national level, Professor Hyland stressed the need for an integrated, partnership-based approach at a local level.

### **NEXT STEPS**

Mr Langford explained that the Working Group which had prepared for the first meeting of the Forum would stay in place until the second meeting. It is envisaged that the Forum will meeting 2-3 times during the year, with actions/suggestions followed up by sub groups meeting in the interim. The next meeting of the Forum will consider an outline constitution and structure for how the Forum could operate, as well as reports back from the three sub groups.

**Next Meeting:      the next full meeting of the Forum will take place on  
27 May 2003**

## **WORKSHOP REPORTS**

### **Report from Workshop 1:**

#### **PROMOTION OF LIFELONG LEARNING**

**Convenor:** Ciarán Lynch

**Facilitator:** Siobhan O'Dowd

While participants agreed with the concept of lifelong learning, the following limitations and barriers which prohibit lifelong learning were highlighted:

- In practice lifelong learning is only available to those on the top of the pile
- Lifelong learning is available to those who can afford it
- Lack of flexibility in education system prohibits lifelong learning
- Modern life pressures work against lifelong learning
- Lifelong learning is contingent upon supports
- Barriers are not just economic, but also social and cultural

Any definition of lifelong learning needs to recognise the barriers as much as the concept itself.

#### **Lifelong Learning Awareness Workshops.**

In promoting lifelong learning, the following aspects should be highlighted – lifelong learning:

- Is needs-based
- Recognises multiple intelligences
- Focuses on learning to learn
- Creates change both at the personal and institutional level
- Encompasses formal and informal learning
- Takes account of lifeskills

The group felt that while there is an abundance of resources and supports and good will to promote lifelong learning, there also needs to be follow-up and follow through in order to establish and maintain trust and credibility. Some concern was expressed that a focus on the consumer in education should not lead to yellow pack education, or to virtual education (ie the provision of education by recognised providers which is not accredited and/or does not allow for progression).

It was agreed that a sub group would meet to progress the following two actions:

### **1. Lifelong Learning Week**

Participants felt that this week should be:

- Active, and reflect all age groups and needs (from cradle to grave)
- Use different mediums of communications
- Enjoyable, fun and participative
- Relevant – with provision for demonstrations, tasters and feedback
- Ongoing (lifelong learning should be an ongoing campaign rather than a “week off” event)
- Needs a budget

### **2. City of Learning Logo**

To be meaningful, such a logo must be shared, and recognised by a wide range of institutions and learners. It should also reflect all ages, and be more than just a statement.

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## **Report from Workshop 2:**

## **Participation**

**Convenor:** Breda White

**Facilitator:** Elmarie McCarthy

**The following issues were all identified as barriers to participation in education:**

Access to pre-school education (integration, early years to primary). Primary and pre-school need to work together more. Whose responsibility is early years?  
Need for quality, access, cost, partnership model

- Lack of awareness of alternative routes (other than points system) to third level education – need to map and publicise existing alternative routes and develop additional alternatives.
- Weak connections between providers of information, finance, guidance and support to adults returning to education, and other stakeholders – need to improve the linkages
- Lack of drop-in childcare facilities – need to look at how childcare resources are being deployed and whether they can be refocussed

- Lack of human resources needed to implement the Child Welfare Act
- Absence of effective role models to counter apathy and disadvantage and to encourage people to participate in education and training.
- Pupils' own behaviour can be a barrier to participation and many children are rejecting school provision. There is a need for more investigation into the causes of early school leaving and development of strategies to combat early school leaving and improve the transition to secondary education. The IPPN is developing a template/model of good practice around the transition from primary to secondary education – this could be promoted by the Forum and possibly extended to the transition to third level.
- Second chance education opportunities should be reflect people's needs – supply should change in order to meet these needs.

**Other issues raised included:**

- Concern about the transfer out of special education.
- Need to investigate and promote a standards-driven approach to learning, and to move beyond certification-driven learning.

*It was agreed that a sub group would meet to work on the issue of adults returning to education – mapping and developing alternative routes, and building linkages between those who provide support, information and guidance to adult learners.*

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**Report from Workshop 3:**

**Economic Aspects of Learning**

**Convenor:** Brendan Goggin

**Facilitator:** Liam McDonnell

The sub-group was requested to identify one area, which should be prioritised for the period to June 2003. Following the discussion the sub group recommended that the following should be prioritised:

*There should be focus on the development in Cork of a culture of lifelong learning involving in the process all relevant stakeholders. This should be based on a partnership approach involving employers, unions, community organisations, public services and educational agencies.*

In seeking to develop the culture of lifelong learning regard should be had to the following:

- The importance of developing knowledge based economy.
- The reliability of change and the pace of change.
- The need to adapt and cope with change.
- The role of lifelong learning in the economy in promoting inclusion and avoiding exclusion.
- The benefits of lifelong learning in developing a flexible and adaptable work force.

## **Discussion**

The following matters were raised in the discussion leading to the recommendation:

- Ireland is losing industries to areas such as Eastern Europe. Globalisation is having large effects with less highly skilled jobs being located in low cost countries.
- Communities in Cork are not equally affected by this, and these with lower skill levels and education qualifications being most at risk.
- Literacy is a basic requirement for connecting to economic opportunities.
- It is imperative to recognise that functioning of our society and its economy is increasingly knowledge based.
- Reskilling the workforce is of importance and work based learning has an important function in regard to this. People should be employable for life but not necessarily with the same employer.
- It is of importance to develop an ethos of lifelong learning in companies. Promotion of lifelong learning is of particular importance for those with low levels of skills.
- Innovative methods of education and training are developing, through, for example, FAS's NET College.
- It is important that the benefits of lifelong learning be promulgated.
- Digital television, e-learning and other media will provide new way of enabling people to participate. The media generally have a very important function in developing attitudes to education and learning. Why do all young people in Ireland want to be members of boy bands or girl bands and young people in India want to be scientists?
- Education is a social activity and approaches need to reflect this. Networks, such as Skill Net, can be of particular importance in meeting the needs of certain sectors of the economy.

- Industry and business need to be incentivised. We need to sell the economic benefits of education and training.
- There is an economic reality of job losses in areas such as agriculture and electronic assembly. It is necessary to compensate for this with a proactive strategy focussed on future needs.
- Learning how to learn is of increased importance. A balance should be maintained between training and education.
- The FAS skills analysis being carried out for Cork will be beneficial in identifying areas of strengths and weaknesses. Development of clusters of excellences and e-learning companies are potential areas of development.
- There is a need to focus on the requirements for a transition to a knowledge economy.
- The lack of developed Research and Development capability had adverse effects in many areas.
- In the same way that we witnessed the decline in areas such as electronic assembly, we should prepare for decline in other sectors such as call centres.
- Lifelong learning should not be only about upskilling and retraining the workforce. Its role in personal development is of importance. Marrying the personal development with development for economic reasons would be especially beneficial.
- Investment in access to education would have major economic benefits. Community based learning has an important role in regard to access.
- Incentivising all stakeholders should be addressed, with multi agency approaches and focussing on the benefits of participating in lifelong learning.

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## **APPENDIX II: LIST OF DELEGATES ATTENDING FORUM**

<b>NAME</b>	<b>ORGANISATION</b>
Maria Kelly	A.S.T.I.
Ciaran Lynch	ABLES Literacy Scheme
Charles Payne	Association of Community & Comprehensive Schools
Siobhan O'Dowd	Ballyphehane Togher CDP
Brendan Murphy	CIT
Dick Langford	City of Cork VEC
Tim Kelleher	Colaiste Stiofain Naofa
Patti O'Brien	Community Forum
Sheila Connolly	Cork Alliance Centre
Sinead Morgan	Cork Auto Project
Chris Dorgan	Cork City Chamber of Commerce
Catherine Sheehan	Cork City Childcare Committee
Pat Ledwidge	Cork City Council
Helen Ryan	Cork College of Commerce
Hannah Weste Fitzpatrick	Cork County Education Forum
Marese Bermingham	Cork Institute of Technology
Brendan Goggin	Cork Institute of Technology
Liam McDonnell	Cork Institute of Technology
Tom Rigney	Cork Institute of Technology
David Lane	Cork Local Drugs Task Force
Tony Geary	Cork Local Youth Voluntary Committee
Sean O'Floinn	Department of Education & Science
Geraldine O'Shea	Dept of Social & Family Affairs
Brendan O'Riordan	Dept. Social and Family Affairs
Phyllis Long	Farranree Education Network
Geraldine White	FAS
Michael Moynihan	Home School Liaison Cluster – Northside
Maeve Griffin	HSCL
Dearbhail McCarthy	IBEC
Justine McCarthy	INTO
Anne Hegarty	IPPN
Donal O'Sullivan	IPPN
Gabriel	IPPN
Liam Hogan	Irish Institute of Training & Development – Cork Chapter
Patricia Harrington	Irish Primary Principles Network
Denis Cronin	Joint Managerial Board
Paddy Ford	Knocknaheeny Education Network
Ger Fox	Linkage Programme
Mary Malone	Mahon Education Network
Mary Kelly	Mayfield Community Education Network
Miriam O'Driscoll	Mayfield Community education network
Patricia Purcell	MEAG

<b>NAME</b>	<b>ORGANISATION</b>
Paul Facey Hunter	National Adult Literacy Agency
Dan O'Shea	National Education Welfare Board
Michael Sheehan	National Educational Psychological Service
Michael O'Sullivan	NTDI
Breda White	Read Write Now
Gerry Reynolds	RTE
John Flavin	SIPTU
Constance Fitzgerald	Southside Education Network
Walter Fleming	T. U. I
Tony O'Neill	Terence McSwiney College
Joan Nolan	The Glen Education Network
Mags Coffey	The Glen Education Network
Sandra Brett	Traveller Adult Literacy Scheme
Cait Mehigan	UCC Student Union
Denis Staunton	University College Cork
Áine Hyland	University College Cork