

CORK CITY LEARNING FORUM

Report Of Plenary Meeting, 30 March 2004



WELCOME & OPENING REMARKS:

Richard Langford, CEO City of Cork VEC & Chair of Cork City Learning Forum

Mr Langford welcomed participants to the third plenary meeting of the Cork City Learning Forum and thanked the Dept of Education and Science for hosting the meeting. On behalf of the Dept of Education and Science Regional Office, Mr Tim Glavin welcomed everyone to the meeting.

REPORTS FROM WORKING GROUPS

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

Tina Neylon reported on the work of the Lifelong Learning Working Group, which had been developing Cork's first Lifelong Learning Festival. At its last plenary meeting the Forum had endorsed a proposal to develop a festival. The organising committee had secured funding for a development officer post from the City of Cork VEC in early 2004. The first festival would take place on 7 and 8 May 2004, and a wide variety of groups were participating. The festival will promote and celebrate learning in all its forms, with events taking place across the city. Events will include interactive workshops, exhibitions, performances, open days, introductory computer lessons and lectures. The final event of the festival will be a concert in City Hall performed entirely by learners. All participating groups will receive festival posters which they can customise to publicise their own events, and the festival programme will be widely distributed.

2. Science, Technology and Education

Presentation by Chris Dorgan, Cork Chamber of Commerce on behalf of the Economic Aspects of Learning working group

The economic working group had continued to focus on science, technology and education. It organised a conference on 13 November 2003 entitled "Science, Technology and Education – Keys to Cork's Future". Speakers included Sean

Dorgan, IDA, Paul Kelly – DES, and William Barrett of Eli Lilly. The conference attracted representatives from primary, second, further and higher education, as well as local industry and state agencies. Interactive workshops identified a series of practical actions which could promote science in Cork, and these will form an agenda for local action.

A table summarising all actions suggested at the conference, and grouped into 5 themes, had been circulated to all delegates for comment and prioritisation – this feedback will inform future actions. In the meantime the working group had identified 2 actions which it would seek to progress:

- Facilitate the development of a Cork Science exhibition in 2005 (with school exhibits and interactive displays supplied/sponsored by industry)
- Facilitate the development of a Science in Cork website

The group was exploring funding opportunities to support both projects.

3. 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

Due to other work pressures this working group had not been reconvened since the last plenary. The survey on the selection and recruitment of mature students had still to be completed. Elmarie reminded delegates of the aims of this survey – to establish baseline information on:

- The level of participation of mature students
- How they apply for places and what alternative entry routes exist
- What links exist between further and higher education
- What policies exist towards the recruitment of mature students and how do institutions seek to promote participation among mature students
- What fees are payable and what financial supports exist

The working group will be reconvened and the survey finalised before the next plenary meeting.

3. KEYNOTE PRESENTATIONS

"Recent Developments in Access to Higher Education"

Presentation by Dr Mary-Liz Trant, Head of the National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education, Higher Education Authority

Thanks to earlier research we now know what needs to be done in order to widen access to higher education in Ireland, argued Dr Trant – the challenge now is to take action and meet the rising expectations (see Annex I for her presentation). She pointed to the establishment of the National Office for Equity of Access to HE as the single co-ordinating office to pull together existing initiatives, and develop a national strategy to widen access to higher education.

Dr Trant gave a brief overview of the work of the new National Office:

- An advisory group had been created to help develop a national strategy on access, and this strategy should be finalised before the end of 2004;
- The office had been involved in consultation across the education community in order to get a sense of what reality exists on the ground and what progress is needed. In particular there is a need to hone in on the best practice which currently exists and to develop what is working well;
- A major review of existing funding programmes (such as the student assistance fund, Millennium Fund, Fund for Students with a Disability and targeted initiative scheme), to ensure they work as effectively as possible.

Focussing on mature students, Dr Trant pointed to the need for:

- Further development of national policy (in particular around part time students)
- Clearer links and pathways prior to higher education;
- Greater development of supports within Higher Education;
- More collaboration and concerted actions; and
- Transformation of our education system to include and value mature students.

She concluded by arguing that we now have the opportunity to make great strides towards achieving equity of access. Working together and building on what is already happening will be critical.

"The National Qualifications Framework – Facilitating Access, Transfer and Progression"

Presentation by Edwin Mernagh, Development Officer, National Qualifications Authority of Ireland

Mr Mernagh gave an overview of the new National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) which involved a major change in the way we recognise learning and in the qualifications system (see presentation in Appendix III). The old system had become incoherent and did not suit all learners. A flexible system was needed with portable qualifications which could be built on as required.

The process of change had started some time ago, in the 1999 Qualifications Act which does not distinguish between "education" and "training", and set up new awarding structures (HETAC and FETAC). The new qualifications framework had been launched last October as a single framework for all education and training awards, with new arrangements for access, transfer and progression.

The framework involves new language and terms. The structure involves 10 "levels" of award which enable us to relate one award to another. There are currently 15 defined "award types". New higher education awards will be available from autumn 2004 and a new system of awards in further education & training is under development. In the framework concept awards are not about the time spent on a programme, but instead are based on what the learner knows. "Named awards" are what the learner actually receives.

The new framework should herald a new era of mobility of learners. The whole concept of access should change – from "how do I get in?" (to a programme) to "how do I get that qualification?" – a refocussing on outcomes rather than inputs (time spent on a programme).

A set of policies have been defined to meet learners' needs – four strands set out what needs to be done around credit, progression routes, entry arrangements and information provision. Further information is available from www.nqai.ie www.hetac.ie www.fetac.ie

4. FEEDBACK FROM WORKSHOP DISCUSSIONS

a) Lifelong Learning

Facilitator: Prof Áine Hyland
Rapporteur: Ciarán Lynch

Discussion in this group focussed on how to make lifelong learning attractive, and identify what barriers exist. The lack of finance was still a key barrier. Yet society owes everyone access to education.

- Issues such as the changing criteria for the Back to Education Initiative and other anomalies highlighted the need to develop the relationship between the Dept of Education and Science, and the Dept of Social and Family Affairs. People must go into a “social welfare limbo” for a period in order to gain access to education and lifelong learning.
- The capping of PLC places works against the very concept of lifelong learning.
- Other barriers to lifelong learning include the lack of funding for part time courses, and the lack of accredited part time courses - where they exist they tend to be fee-paying. The group hoped that the qualifications framework would rectify this problem.
- Concern was expressed that lifelong learning should not be tied exclusively to the national qualifications framework.
- The group commented that certain areas of lifelong learning are favoured over others by the Dept of Education – a conflict between economic society and social society. Lifelong Learning was not only for work!
- It was noted that older learners were often an “invisible” group in education. Outside of community education, fees are a problem for older learners.
- Early school leavers continue to slip the net, and concern was expressed at the absence of schools completion programmes in many areas.
- The introduction of level 1 and 2 certificates in the new framework was welcomed as a positive development for the community education sector in promoting lifelong learning
- The chart locating all qualifications on the new framework was a guide guideline/basis on which each provider could set out their stall and for developing referral routes
- The NQAI should put up a stand in the lifelong learning festival

b) Access and participation

Facilitator: Dr Mary Liz Trant
Rapporteur: Elmarie McCarthy

Concern was expressed that some people are viewed as being too hard to deal with and may never get to stage 1. It's easier to progress people who have begun, but often difficult to motivate people to see the need for basic skills. The group pointed to the policy disconnect evident in the recent capping of PLC numbers – this will limit access and affect access, transfer and progression.

For access to be improved a number of changes are needed:

- We must look deeply at people's needs, and ensure that all levels connect (eg if family-friendly jobs don't exist many there is a sense of "why bother".)
- Bring provision into the community and giving a face to the providers
- Develop pre-foundation FETAC as foundation is too daunting for some (the new level 1 and 2 should meet this need and help boost learner confidence)
- Improve supply and user-friendliness of information (eg re opportunities which exist, eg many still think Leaving Cert is needed for entry to third level)
- Education providers need to listen to where people are at, and change their system to meet new needs rather than vice versa.
- Need for more teacher training eg on teaching adults, responding to children in difficulty etc. Such in service training is difficult to source
- Importance of informal links, eg between community and providers. These local connections allow for flexible responses.
- Importance of access courses in FE and HE (eg Colaiste Stiofain Naofa's flexible short term access courses give a taste of what's on offer, help socialisation and help people to decide what to do next)

The system is still failing to meet the needs of many young people, who are lost from the system at a very early stage, and labelled because the system can't cope. It was noted that 80% of the people in education in Spike Island had left school at primary level, the majority expelled. The transition from primary to second level was difficult – and young boys in particular were not getting through the system. To improve access to higher education you need to go right back to early childhood learning and primary education (eg need for early intervention, work with parents, incorporate learning into doing, make school less of an alien environment).

c) Economy (employability)

Facilitator: Edwin Mernagh
Rapporteur: Dearbhail McCarthy

- There was a general discussion around the area of training and Skillnets in particular was mentioned. It was noted that accreditation is very important to students not only for their own sense of achievement but also to use on CVs to improve their employability.
- The group agreed that a competency accreditation system rather than a time-based system was far more effective for mature or part-time students. It is not always possible for these students to devote years towards study. Their past achievements/qualifications should be noted and recognised in courses.
- The Group felt it was appropriate to move from the concept of education and training to that of Learning.
- Course content for those in continuing education was also discussed. The Group believed that often the courses offered to mature/part-time students are not entirely relevant. The focus of these courses may need to be adapted to suit the experience of the audience. Mature/Part-time students are often studying to enhance their existing qualifications and this must be recognised and greater flexibility given. This is a cause of concern for third level organisations who often feel that this is a 'dumbing down' of a course. This concern needs to be addressed.
- There needs to be more dialogue between industry and education providers at every level. There is too much emphasis on FÁS as the main training provider.
- Another important theme that was discussed was the over-emphasis on the academic route for students. Many students are simply not aware of other more vocational options which are available to them on completion of second level. There is a need in Ireland for a culture of Guidance. It is important that career guidance teachers are informed on all the options available to students and know more about industry-based competences. This must be achieved through greater co-operation with the education providers and also industry and business.
- It was noted that parents must also be targeted for information up-dates as they are usually the primary influencers on children's subject choices and early career choices.

5. CLOSING COMMENTS

In her concluding comments Prof Áine Hyland stressed the value of having people across the spectrum come together to share experience. The Forum is an example of how to develop such partnerships – should be promoted and given real standing.

Dr Mary-Liz Trant echoed this point and stressed argued the importance of the local in achieving and influencing change should not be underestimated. The messages she received today confirmed the need for long term investment in promoting access to higher education.

Edwin Mernagh concluded by stressing that the need to communicate what's happening in the qualifications framework and to highlight the variety of learning routes which exist – so that all learning is valued. There is a particular need to communicate with guidance counsellors and training and development personnel in the business sector.

Closing the meeting Richard Langford concluded that the key message from both keynote speakers was about “transformation” – the need to transform the system and meet the needs have previously gone unmet. The changes underway in the education system were putting learners, not providers at the centre, and stressing the value of recognising learning outcomes, rather than where and when learning takes place.

Mr Langford reported that the next plenary meeting would take place in the autumn. The working groups will continue to meet in the interim, overseen by the Steering Group. Membership of the working groups remains open to anyone who is interested in joining.

APPENDIX I: LIST OF DELEGATES ATTENDING FORUM

NAME	ORGANISATION
Burke, Karen	Togher Family Centre
Buttimer, Liz	Mayfield Community Education Network
Corkery, Mary	Ballyphehane/Togher Education Network
Cusack, Martina	Mayfield Community Education Network
Dineen, Susan	Fort Mitchell Education Service
Dorgan, Chris	Cork Chamber of Commerce
Elders, Marion	University College Cork
Fitzgerald, Constance	Ballyphehane/Togher Education Network
Glavin, Tim	Dept of Education and Science, Regional Office
Harrington, Patricia	Enable Ireland
Hyland, Aine	University College Cork
Kelly, Mary	Mayfield Community Education Network
Kirwan, Eamonn	Cork City Library/City Education Network
Langford, Richard	City of Cork VEC
Lehane, Con	Retired People's Network
Lenihan, Mary	Cork City Partnership
Looney, J	St John's Central College
Lynch, Ciarán	ABLES Literacy Scheme
Lynch, Jennifer	National Adult Literacy Authority
Maher, James	CIT Student Union
Malone, Mary	Mahon Community Education Network
Maloney, Rosalie	Joint Managerial Board/Association of Management of Catholic Secondary Schools

NAME	ORGANISATION
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
Mernagh, Edwin	National Qualifications Authority of Ireland
Murphy, Joseph	Farranree Education Network
Murphy, Pat	Parents Association of Community & Comprehensive Schools
Neylon, Tina	Lifelong Learning Festival
Ní Bhaoill, Fiodhna	Irish Primary Principals Network
O'Reilly, Bernie	Fort Mitchell Education Service
O'Shea, Dan	National Education Welfare 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	College of Commerce
Scriven, Mary	Coláiste Stiofáin Naofa
Sullivan, Dominic	Dept of Education & Science, Regional Office
Trant, Mary-Liz	National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education
Walsh, Bernie	Project for Adult Guidance in Education
Weste-Fitzpatrick, Hannah	UCC/County Learning Forum
White, Breda	Read Write Now

APPENDIX II: Presentation by Dr Mary Liz Trant




**Educational opportunity for all:
Widening access to higher education in
Ireland**



2004
Educational opportunity for all
– how do we measure up?

OECD – 1960s and 21st century

EU and presidency

Democracy and “taking our place among the nations
of the world”



Higher Education Authority
An tArd-Chomhairle



Higher Education Authority
An tArd-Chomhairle

Current state

- serious work to be done
- expectations – reality to match rhetoric
- body of policy documents, legislation, research
- sense of opportunity
- action – National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education

Background to establishment of National Office

Evaluations and reports – Clancy, Points Commission, Osborne, Skilbeck, –showing extent of inequality, need for concerted action, targets, consolidation of effort, clear sense of direction

Report of Action Group on Access to Third Level Education (2001)



Higher Education Authority
An tArd-Chomhairle



Higher Education Authority
An tArd-Chomhairle

Under-represented groups in higher education



the socio-economically disadvantaged
mature students
those with disabilities



Action Group report: comprehensive review of policy and initiatives

78 recommendations

Message – there is a democratic, social and economic imperative for us to widen access to higher education

Central recommendation:

A single co-ordinating body: the National Office



Higher Education Authority
An tArd-Chomhairle

Some illustrative data

Last survey – 46% school-leaving cohort transferred to full-time higher education (Clancy)
 Rate for 'unskilled manual worker' group = 22%

2001 – mature students account for 5% of full-time students in higher education – OECD average =c.25%

Last survey- students with a disability in full-time higher education = 1.1% (AHEAD)
 8% of our population estimated to have disability

The National Office is Established

August 2003

National Office within the Higher Education Authority, with remit for entire higher education sector



National Office functions and work plan 2004

A national strategy

Policy advice

Managing funding programmes

Monitoring progress

National targets (2001 Action Group)

Socio-economically disadvantaged

1998	16-22%
2006	27-33%



Mature Students (full-time)

1998	4.5%
2006	10%



Students with a Disability

1998	1.1%
2006	1.8%



Mature Students (part-time)

1998	22%
2006	30%



Work to date

National strategy – for Winter 2004

Consultation across the education community

Building on experience - projects 2004

Ensuring effective and timely financial support

Mature Students

Need for particular action:

- National policy
- Prior to higher education, including further education and adult and community education
- Within higher education

Importance of collaboration and concerted action

Transforming our education system to include and value mature students

To sum up

- opportunity to make great strides
- partnership and collaboration are key

The lifelong learning ideal

APPENDIX III: PRESENTATION BY MR EDWIN MERNAGH

The National Framework of Qualifications - Facilitating Access, Transfer and Progression

Edwin Mernagh

Development Officer, National Qualifications Authority of Ireland

A Framework of Qualifications – why?

- a coherent national policy approach to qualifications
- lifelong learning society
- need for a more flexible system of qualifications
- need for portability of qualifications
- international comparison and alignment
- European policy trends and agreements – Lisbon, Copenhagen and Bologna

Towards a coherent but flexible system....

what is required?

‘A framework for the development, recognition and award of qualifications in Ireland’

Change is already under way

- Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999
- three new organisations, 2001
- National Qualifications Authority of Ireland
- Further Education and Training Awards Council
- Higher Education and Training Awards Council
- awards Councils bring coherence to the system
- replace seven previous systems of awards
- one awarding body for further education and training

Recent events and decisions

- National Framework of Qualifications launched in October 2003
- new arrangements to promote access, transfer and progression – Oct ‘03
- one National Framework for all education and training awards
- includes Junior and Leaving Certs, higher education awards, further education and training awards
- 10 Levels, 15 award-types
- new awards in higher education, from autumn 2004
- placement in the Framework of previously-made awards has begun, March 2004

The Framework: a blueprint for change

- a new concept of an ‘award’:
an award is a recognition of learning outcomes
- new awards, new titles
- new terminology
- learning outcomes
- levels and level indicators
- award-types and award-type descriptors

- named awards

The Framework in outline

- a structure of 10 levels
- each level based on a range of standards of knowledge, skill and competence
- level indicators

Award-types

- a central element in the Framework concept
- a class of named awards – e.g. Honours Bachelor Degree
- one or more award-types at each level in the Framework
- an initial set of 15 major award-types defined

Classes of award-type

- award-types are defined in four classes
- major award-types: for a typical range of outcomes at a level
- also minor, supplemental and special-purpose award-types
- all 15 award-types in the outline Framework are ‘major’
- the Framework will eventually have a variety of award-types at each level.

Named awards

- a learner receives a ‘named award’
- a named award is for achievement in a specific field of learning – e.g. Honours Bachelor Degree in Electronic Engineering
- a named award is associated with a level in the Framework through the award-type to which it belongs
- named awards to be developed by the awarding bodies

The National Framework of Qualifications

10 levels

15 major award-types

Awarding bodies

- FETAC
- HETAC
- State Examinations Commission
- DIT
- Seven universities

A new era of mobility for learners

- lifelong learning implies a more diverse learning community
- more diverse needs
- challenge of change
- organisations
- structures
- systems
- task – to maximise opportunities for mobility for learners

Vision for learner mobility

- The learner should be able to enter and successfully participate in a programme, or series of programmes leading to an award, or series of awards, in pursuit of their learning objectives.
- The National Framework of Qualifications and associated programme provision should be structured to facilitate learner entry, and to promote transfer and progression;

- Thus, learners will be encouraged to participate in the learning process to enable them to realise their ambitions to the full extent of their abilities

Implementing a new vision for mobility for learners

- A cultural shift is needed
- focus of the concept of access on the achievement of an award (rather than on entry to a programme)
- Focus on outcomes: inputs (e.g. time spent on a programme) not to be part of success measurement

What learners need for mobility

- to be able to gain an award in different ways, e.g. by accumulating credit for learning outcomes over time
- opportunity for entry – transparent, fair and consistent entry arrangements
- clarity about relationships between awards, and about transfer / progression routes
- accurate and reliable information

Meeting learners' needs

- a comprehensive strategy, published in October 2003
- policies
- actions for the Authority and the awards Councils
- procedures for providers
- four policy strands
- credit, progression routes, entry arrangements, information provision

Procedures to promote mobility

– some examples

- Providers to specify arrangements for the recognition of prior learning.
- identification of transfer and progression routes; specification of requirements for transfer and progression
- statements of the knowledge, skill and competence needed as a basis for successful participation
- clarity about awards demonstrating eligibility for entry
- information protocols

Information protocols – some examples

- all providers, for each and every programme, will publish in a standard and accessible format
 - the arrangements for eligibility to enter, including a statement of the knowledge, skill and competence needed by the learner as a basis for successful participation on the programme
 - arrangements to assess learner's eligibility to enter
 - further selection arrangements, where these apply
 - a statement of arrangements available for recognition of prior learning, for entry to each of their programmes, and for access to an award
 - possibilities for transfer and/or progression associated with the programme, including any relevant specific progression linkages

Next steps:

- implementing the Framework
- awards Councils to establish standards for named awards
- awards meeting new Framework standards to be available in June 2006
- programmes commencing autumn 2006 to lead to new Framework awards
- many new awards to be available sooner

- further developments
- development of additional award-types
- inclusion of professional & international awards – draft policies & criteria, 2004
- national approach to credit
- review process, 2006

Further Information

All developments are featured on the website of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland:
www.nqai.ie

New website for the Framework under construction: www.nfq.ie

See also the awards Councils' websites:

- www.fetac.ie
- www.hetac.ie