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Lifelong Learning Policies in Ireland

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Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO LIFELONG LEARNING

> This introduction shows
> - general outline of LLL and the educational system, and
> - how political, cultural, economic factors, demography, immigration/emigration, minorities have influenced developments in the area of lifelong learning.

Ireland has moved from a country with high unemployment and net emigration to one of net immigration and unemployment rates of less than 5%. Despite this recent economic growth, Central Statistics Office (2004) figures indicate that for close to one-fifth of the adult population, over the age of 15, the highest level of education achieved is at primary level. Furthermore, only 45% of our current adult population have completed secondary education, and Ireland has the second lowest level of literacy among 22 countries recently surveyed by the OECD (2000). In that survey, 24% of Irish adults were found to have a level of literacy below that required for fully effective participation in society.

There is growing recognition that widening participation in lifelong learning must be reinforced in the future if Ireland is to capitalise on its economic success over the last decade or so. (OECD, 2004). The importance of lifelong learning has become even more centre stage given current demographic trends where, in Ireland and throughout Europe, there is a decline in births.

Historically, Ireland has had a strong community-based adult education sector underpinned by high levels of volunteerism. As a consequence, social forces have always been viewed as key drivers, alongside the economic forces at play, in the promotion of lifelong learning agenda. Lifelong learning is seen as key to personal development and social inclusion as *'…education empowers individuals to participate fully and creatively in their communities.'* (Department of Education and Science, 1995). Building on the *Green Paper on Adult Education* (1998) and driven very much by the E.U. agenda on lifelong learning, the Irish Government published its *White Paper on Adult Education* entitled *Learning for Life* (2000).

This key document represents our most significant policy development in adult education/lifelong learning, to date. Crucially, the White Paper marks the adoption of lifelong learning as the 'governing principle' of education policy in the Republic of Ireland.

In setting out its policy objectives for lifelong learning, a number of core themes are highlighted, namely, that lifelong learning should embrace personal, cultural and social goals as well as economic ones and be seen as promoting collective as well as personal advancement. Additionally, the needs of marginalized groups are to be addressed explicitly and the role of community education providers in the field of adult education is to be strengthened.

Underpinning the overall framework of lifelong learning are 6 areas of priority:

- Consciousness Raising: to realise full potential; self-discovery; personal and collective development.
- Citizenship: to grow in self-confidence, social awareness and social responsibility; proactive role in shaping overall direction to the society and community/societal decision-making.
- Cohesion: to enhance social capital and empower those significantly disadvantaged.
- Competitiveness: adult education role in providing a skilled workforce
- Cultural Development: role of adult education in enriching cultural fabric of society.
- Community Development: role of adult education in development of structural analysis and collective sense of purpose

Rather than being merely a tag on to the economic rationale for lifelong learning, the White Paper, centres the issue of social cohesion through its emphasis on active citizenship through personal, community and cultural development.

Links between formal education and lifelong learning.

The Department of Education and Science (DES) and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DETE) have joint policy responsibility for lifelong learning. The Irish government has designated a Minister of State, located within the Department of Education and Science, with special responsibility for Adult Education, Youth Affairs and Educational Disadvantage.

In terms of links between the formal education system and lifelong learning, a number of key initiatives at each educational level have been developed with the promotion of lifelong learning as a core objective.

a) At both primary and secondary levels in 1999, the successful Home School Community Liaison scheme was introduced in schools with designated disadvantaged status. Central to this scheme is partnership and collaboration between parents and teachers in the interests of the child's learning. The Scheme is delivered through a co-ordinator (teacher), who is assigned to a school or group of schools and who works from the school-site outreaching to the families and broader community, including providing education such as literacy support for families. The aims of the scheme are

   1) To maximise active participation of the children in the schools of the scheme in the learning process, in particular those who might be at risk of failure

   2) To promote active cooperation between home, school and relevant community agencies in promoting the educational interests of the children

   3) To raise awareness in parents of their own capacities to enhance their children's educational progress and to assist them in developing relevant skills and

4) To enhance the children's uptake from education, their retention in the education system, their continuation to post-compulsory education and to third level and their attitudes to life-long learning.

b) Since 1988, the Departments of Education and Science and Enterprise, Trade and Employment have been funding Youthreach, a key education programme which complements mainstream secondary education and facilitates the lifelong learning of those most at risk of educational disadvantage. The programme is directed specifically at unemployed young early school leavers aged 15-20 with no formal education or training qualifications. Youthreach programmes are offered in out-of-school settings located throughout the country, generally in disadvantaged areas. While Youthreach is a national programme, centres are locally managed, and programmes reflect the particular social, economic and cultural environment in which they operate. The Youthreach programme focuses on the holistic development of the individual and is both participant-centred and participant-led, with the programme following trainees' identified interests and needs and participants and staff acting as equal partners in the learning process. There is an emphasis on recognising and rewarding achievement rather than reinforcing failure and flexibility at all levels (management, relationships, programme). Interactions are less formal and relationships with staff are 'warmer' than in schools and many observers argue that this is an important component in the programme's success. The young people perceive themselves to be listened to and respected, i.e. treated as adults. Groups are relatively small - the tutor-learner ratio is about 10:1. Participants receive a financial stipend each week for participation. The programme works particularly positively with young people from the travelling community and other ethnic minorities.

c) FAS, as Ireland's national training and employment authority, provides and delivers services and learning opportunities in a way that seeks to address social exclusion. The vision is that each learner will be given access to the skills, supports and resources needed to engage in learning on a lifelong basis. FAS operates on a strong community partnership model networking closely with the community in which it is working. The core values of FAS include; access for all, employability, equity, choices and integration.   FAS in conjunction with the VEC operate a Return to Education Programme which enables participants on FAS funded Community Employment (CE) schemes to be released half-time from their work experience programme to avail of intensive literacy tuition by the VECs while still in receipt of their training allowance

d) A recent significant development in terms of promoting lifelong learning within the third-level education sector was the creation, of the National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education The facilitates educational access and opportunity for groups who are under-represented in higher education - those who experience socio-economic disadvantage, those with a disability and mature students – and provides financial incentives to universities to meet target numbers of these students through reserved places and Dedicated Access Officers.

Other key stakeholders:

There are a number of other key stakeholders who have a central role to play in taking the Lifelong Learning Agenda forward and who identify itself most easily and closely with the concept of Lifelong Learning, namely; the Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA) which run Adult Education courses; Post-Leaving Certificate Courses (PLCs); Vocational

Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS). There are also many NGOs and voluntary bodies providing ongoing education for Lifelong Learning including National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) and the National Association of Adult Education (AONTAS).

1. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

This section consists of

- Summary of the main literature which has influenced academic/scientific analysis of post-compulsory education and LLL
- Outline of the team's perspectives
- Identification of the main competing perspective(s) in the national context

The Green Paper on Adult Education: Education in an Era of Lifelong Learning' (1998) began a national debate and informed Government policy with regard to the role of Adult Education in meeting the challenges confronting this society currently. It espoused a holistic and inclusive system of education and within an overall national policy commitment to lifelong learning. The rationale for investment in adult and community education, as explicated in the Green Paper, was not based '…entirely on economic considerations and issues of disadvantage, but also on the role of learning in creating a more democratic and civilised society by promoting culture, identity and well-being and by strengthening individuals, families and communities.' (1998, 16)

The role of lifelong learning in the promotion of both active citizenship and community development has been enshrined in key education policy documents

Furthermore, it is recognised that the development of lifelong learning in an Irish context needs to be underpinned by three core principles:

- A systematic approach – requiring that '…educational policies must be designed to embrace the lifecycle, reflect the multiplicity of sites, both formal and informal, in which learning can take place, provide for appropriate supports such as guidance, counselling and childcare and for mechanisms to assess learning…'
- Equality – '… of access, participation and outcome for participants in adult education, with proactive strategies to counteract barriers arising from differences of socio-economic status, gender, ethnicity and disability…'
- Inter-culturalism – the need to frame educational policy and practice in the context of serving a diverse population as opposed to a uniform one, and the development of curricula, materials, training and in-service, modes of assessment and delivery methods which accept such diversity as the norm…'
(White Paper on Adult Education, Learning for Life, 2000)

The Department of Education and Science (DES) also has a number of high priority goals, which are clearly embedded in the lifelong learning imperative, namely;

- To promote equity and inclusion and quality outcomes
- To promote lifelong learning
- To plan for education that is relevant to personal, social, cultural and economic needs

To this end the DES aims to substantially improve attainment levels at first and second levels and eliminate early school leaving and to ensure that all those completing

secondary level education have, at a minimum, an adequate standard of basic skills. The DES is engaged in a wide range of activities covering the key elements of policy planning, quality assurance, resourcing, regulation and evaluation, as well as providing a broad range of support services for the education sector.

There is a need to bring integration of adult education with primary school parental involvement. The connection of these two levels has been emphasised recently (2005) by the Statutory Committee on Educational Disadvantage.

Our team's theoretical perspective mirrors the priority areas of the White Paper:

- Consciousness Raising.
- Citizenship
- Cohesion
- Competitiveness
- Cultural Development
- Community Development

Our holistic, eclectic approach encompasses elements of radical community development, liberal and humanistic personal development and economic rationales for lifelong learning. The example of the literacy needs of prisoners illustrates how all of these approaches are important and are potentially complementary. Morgan & Kett (2003) note high levels of early school leaving and literacy problems among the prison population, both male and female; such high levels of literacy problems also existed in younger prisoners despite the fact that literacy problems tend to be significantly higher among older groups compared to younger groups in the general population. Education as self development, literacy skills, including the arts and literacy and economic rationales all combine in a complementary fashion for this group.

The main competing perspective in Ireland is not so much ideological as simply giving financial priority to adult education over other areas. Figures from 2005, indicate that expenditure on adult and community education accounted for approximately 2.2% of the Department of Education and Science's overall budget. Currently, less than 3 euros out of every 100 spent by the Department of Education and Science is spent on adult education – though recognised as a key part of lifelong learning agenda. This is despite it being explicitly acknowledged by the Irish Government that one of Ireland's economic and social vulnerabilities to meeting its objectives is the slow roll out of the lifelong learning agenda. There is little doubt that the range of reports and structures and the weight of Irish Government activity provide clear evidence of its pursuing the lifelong learning agenda. However, with regard to self-development as a natural by-product of adult education and Lifelong Learning, community education groups nationwide report a growing unease at the de-emphasis in education for the improvement in social capital and a move toward the ethos of education for economic reasons.

2. INFLUENCE OF CONCEPTUALISATIONS AND DRIVERS ON LLL POLICY AND PRACTICE

In this section the authors
- Outline and critically analyse the importance of economic, personal development, and active citizenship/social inclusion perspectives on LLL policy and practice in a national context
- Identify any significant gaps in policy or practice.

Personal Development Dimensions

Lifelong Learning in Ireland is very much driven by social inclusion, personal development and self-actualisation along with emphasis on economic drivers (cf. White Paper, 2000).

Addressing Social and Educational Inequality/Access and Widening Participation

With regard to access to higher education, there are a range of schemes and measures available to assist students from disadvantaged background to avail of third level and further education. The National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education is the key driver in this area. The measures include

- Lowering of entry requirements for courses for third level for socio-economically marginalized groups, with alternative requirements such as essay, interview and/or aptitude test plus references. Similar positive discrimination for access to third level for mature students and students with a disability.
- Fee reduction and/or suspension. Although there is a continuing debate/argument over third level fees in that part-time courses are fee paying and full time ones not.
- Provision of Back to Education Allowances/ Grant Aid.
- Access courses and dedicated full-time College Access Officers in every university. Full-time mature students' officers also.
- Outreach initiatives, as well as university campus visits for students from traditionally socio-economically disadvantaged areas, visits for primary and secondary school students to break down cultural barriers and to introduce them to students who can serve as role models for them as many will know no one who has ever been to third level
- Community education.
- Mentoring and peer supports for access students.
- College tutors and writing workshop supports
- On site childcare - "no crèche-no class"
- Financial incentives for third level institutions to increase access for socio-economically marginalized groups, including ethnic minorities. The institutions compete for state funding based on their performance with regard to increasing access.
- Modularisation of courses

Active Citizenship/Social Inclusion

The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) in their Learners' Development Plan outline a range of activities that aim to promote active citizenship and empowerment. Through a range of courses available to adult learners that will enable learners to develop skills and become more confident in participation in decision-making, group work and facilitation and engagement in wider society.

A Government Task Force in Active Citizenship was established in April, 2006 to determine how to promote greater citizen participation in communities and in society. The Task Force is to consider on a broad basis the policies and actions at official level which can help or hinder civic engagement, while on a individual level it will seek to identify the supports which help encourage people to become involved and to stay involved.

Gaps

- Need for speedier implementation of the White Paper and increased proportion of education budget to lifelong learning
- The Irish Statutory Committee on Educational Disadvantage (2005) highlight the need for 'a dedicated family literacy budget'.
- There is no master concept of lifelong learning to be found among the many policy documents

3. UNDERSTANDINGS AND OPERATIONALISATIONS OF LLL

In this section the authors will

- Provide critical commentary on how LLL has been understood, defined and operationalised in an Irish context
- Explain the relative importance of formal, non-formal, and informal education/learning,
- Include how effectively LLL interfaces with the formal education system.
- Outline the system (if any) for accreditation and/or certification of learning, and provide a brief critical analysis.

Lifelong Learning is understood and defined in this country as: -

"…All purposeful learning activity, whether formal or informal, undertaken on an ongoing basis with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence." (The National Economic & Social Council, 1999).

The NESC Report also stresses the importance of lifelong learning for improving not just employability but considers it to be "essential for personal fulfilment outside the labour market as well."

Within the Irish context, the lifelong learning agenda has come to be based on three fundamental attributes:

- it is lifelong and therefore concerns everything from the cradle to the grave
- it is life-wide recognising that learning occurs in many different settings
- it focuses on learning rather than limits itself to education (White Paper, Learning for Life 2000).

The White Paper in recognising Adult and Community Education as a key sector in the lifelong learning continuum – defined adult education as 'systematic learning undertaken by adults who return to learning having concluded initial education or training'.

Interface of Lifelong Learning with Formal Education

Despite much greater recognition that the formal education system in Ireland is fundamental to lifelong learning, rather than a separate set of provisions that precedes it, there is as yet little evidence of a more fundamental rethinking of this distinct role of formal educational settings which there should be to meet the challenge posed by lifelong and lifewide learning.

The Operationalisation of Lifelong Learning in Ireland

Both the Green and White Papers on adult education and lifelong learning proposed the provision of national and local structures, in the form of a National Adult Learning Council (NALC) and Local Adult Learning Boards (LALB), respectively. The objective being to develop an integrated and strategic framework for the development of the lifelong learning sector. Such a structure it was deemed would provide for an area based approach to assessing priority lifelong learning needs at local level, support a cross fertilisation of expertise within a common quality framework and enable the range of lifelong learning providers to work effectively together. To date, the NALC although established in 2002, albeit on a non-statutory basis, was suspended in 2003 never having met.

Nonetheless, a number of key recommendations listed in the White Paper have been or are currently being implemented:

- the National Adult Literacy Programme
- the Back to Education Initiative
- the Adult Education Guidance Initiative and
- the Appointment of Community Education Facilitators

The Vocational Education sector represented through vocational education committees (VECs) have played a critical role in the development of adult and second chance education to date, in Ireland. More than 90% of PLC courses are provided in the VEC sector, along with the Youthreach and senior traveller training centre programmes for early school leavers, the vocational training opportunity scheme for unemployed adults and the adult literacy service.

Accreditation/Certification of Learning

The Report of the Taskforce on Lifelong Learning (2002) acknowledges that lifelong learning requires that the qualifications framework espouses and encompasses prior learning. Furthermore the Report states that the accreditation approach should be a broad one and not confined to formal learning; thus including learning on-the-job, uncertified community-based learning and self-directed learning.

The National Qualifications Authority is currently working to standardise qualifications so that transfers between institutions and the recognition of prior certified learning can be facilitated, however, progress is slow. Following the approval of FETAC policy on the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), a pilot implementation has commenced in December 2005. The purpose of the pilot is to assess and identify implementation issues relating to providers and FETAC regarding the recognition of prior learning. The pilot will help facilitate the development of RPL by providers in the context of their own education and training services.

4. SIGNIFICANCE OF KEY CONCEPTS IN LLL POLICY

In this section, the authors will explain and account for the importance of the following concepts in LLL policy and practice in Ireland:
- Learning citizens
- Knowledge society
- Learning cities/regions
- Learning organisations
- Others (if any)

Learning Citizens:

While the concept of learning citizen is not directly employed within an Irish context, nonetheless, for a number of lifelong learning initiatives across the state, the notion of 'a learning citizen' is espoused as central to their objectives. One such example is that of the University College Dublin Outreach Partnership Programme which has a commitment to providing opportunities for lifelong learning through focussing on knowledge, education and training and providing flexible methods of course delivery with the goal of facilitating citizens to update their knowledge and skills.

Knowledge Society:

In 2001, the Irish Government established the second Information Society Commission which reported in December 2002, 'Building the Knowledge Society' in which they identified Ireland's relative strengths and weaknesses in addressing the challenges of the emerging knowledge society.

Key to the development of the knowledge society in an Irish context was the establishment in 2001 of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI). Since its establishment, a single unified framework of qualifications has been developed through the work of the NQAI, along with the creation of both the Further and Higher Education and Training Awards Councils (FETAC and HETAC respectively). These bodies now provide a single structure (funded through the DES) for the accreditation of all non-university education and training at further and higher levels in Ireland.

In relation to university-based higher education, the Higher Education Authority (HEA) is the statutory planning and development body for higher education and research in Ireland. The principal functions of the HEA include:

- To maintain a continuous review of the demand and need for higher education.
- To promote the attainment of equality of opportunity in higher education and democratisation of higher education.

Learning Cities/Regions

The concept of the Learning Region is still relatively new Ireland. In 2004 the University of Limerick with the theme of 'Developing the Learning Region' hosted the European Universities Continuing Education Network (EUCEN) Conference.

Ireland has a number of initiatives listed on the virtual community website of the R3L Network (The European Networks to Promote the Local and Regional Dimension of Lifelong Learning Initiative). The R3L Project is a new initiative of the European Commission to promote "Regional Networks in Lifelong Learning".

In relation to education generally, the Department of Education and Science has recently established ten regional offices for the information and advice on the education services available on a local/regional basis.

Learning Organisations:

There are a number of key learning organisations and organisations which co-ordinate initiatives across the adult education/lifelong learning sector in Ireland.

- FAS is Ireland's national training and employment authority. They aim to promote a more competitive and inclusive knowledge-based economy, in collaboration with their stakeholders, by enhancing the skills and capabilities of individuals and enterprises.

- NALA is a membership organisation with voluntary status concerned with national co-ordination; training and policy development in adult literacy work in Ireland.

- AONTAS is the Irish National Association of Adult Education, a voluntary membership organisation. It exists to promote the development of a learning society through the provision of a quality and comprehensive system of adult learning and education, which is accessible to and inclusive of all. Through its members, self-development is at the core of its community education provision taking ethnic communities into specific account. By its nature AONTAS is an outreach organisation. Community ownership is key to the members of AONTAS especially in the area of community education.

5. LEGISLATION AND POLICY

In this section the authors state what have been the key legislative/policy items on lifelong learning (in recent years), and why they have been 'key'. In addition, it will be identified
- What other areas of policy have had or are having a driving influence on LLL policy and practice? (*for example* social security, community development.)
- How important EU policy has been in forming LLL policy in Ireland? In particular, what impact (if any) have the Lisbon strategy and goals had? Please give some examples.
- How important has been the policy of other international organisations (UNESCO, OECD, etc.)? Please give some examples.
- How well policy is co-ordinated between various government agencies (including national, regional and local levels of government)? What are the key government agencies involved? How are the problems of co-ordination being addressed, and how effectively?
- What are the key stakeholders/social partners/NGOs, and what has been their relative influence?

Key Legislative Developments

While the OECD Report (2004) notes that Ireland has an impressive legislative framework for dealing with adult education and lifelong education: the 1997 Universities Act identified a role for the universities in promoting lifelong learning through the provision of adult and continuing education; in 2000 the Government issued a White Paper Learning for Life; and this was followed by The Qualification (Education and Training) Act in 1999 and the National Training Fund Act; the Adult Learning Council established in 2002 (was later suspended in 2003) and the National Qualifications Framework in 2003. Nevertheless, the Statutory Committee on Educational Disadvantage (2005) notes that 'Ireland lags behind other industrialised countries in having no legislative basis for paid educational leave to enable people to gain qualifications later in life, having been educationally disadvantaged in their earlier years'

Some of the key legislative provisions in relation to lifelong learning are as follows:

The Universities Act (1997)

- Section 9 (j) of which states that one of the objectives is to 'facilitate lifelong learning through the provision of adult and continuing education'

The Education Act (1998):

- Promotes equality of access

- Promotes opportunities for adults especially those who did not avail of or benefit from education in school

The National Qualifications (Education and Training Act) (1999):

- Established an administrative structure for the development, recognition and awarding of education and training qualifications in the state and the definition of their functions

Education Welfare Act (2000):

- As to the age at which individuals may, in effect, return to education. The Education Welfare Act (Ireland) 2000 sets compulsory school attendance age in Ireland to 16 years, or completion of lower second-level education, whichever is the later. Thus, post-compulsory education in Ireland commences on or after the individual reaching the age of 16 or having completed the Junior Certificate Examinations (Equivalent of Level 2 -ISCED 1997).

While key policy developments include:

Green Paper Adult Education in an Era of Learning (1998):

The Department's Green Paper Adult Education in an Era of Life Long Learning (1998) argues that the key elements of the concept of lifelong learning are "providing learning opportunities over a life span rather than only in the early years, widening recognition to embrace new forms of learning [and] recognising that learning takes place in a range of settings wider than schools and colleges". Objectives of the Green Paper included: establishing the basis for a national policy on Adult Education and to identify priorities areas, the proposal of mechanisms for the co-ordination of this sector within an holistic and inclusive system of education and within an overall national policy commitment to lifelong learning.

White Paper on Adult Learning – 'Learning for Life' (2000).

Building from the Green Paper, this key policy document reflects critically on the role of adult education and lifelong learning in Irish society while setting out the Irish Government's policies and priorities for the future development of this education sector. Indeed as stated earlier in the report, the White Paper represents the most significant policy development in adult education/lifelong learning, to date, in Ireland.

National Development Plan NDP (2000-2006)

Following through from these policy documents, the National Development Plan set as a priority the "continued investment in education and training and, in particular, through developing a strategic vision for lifelong learning" (National Development Plan 2000-2006, para. 5.21).

In the light of this, investment in education under the Plan was to concentrate on:

- Prevention of early school leaving;
- Increasing the retention rate at second level;

- Expanding adult and second chance education and training opportunities;
- Widening access to third level education;
- Improving the funding situation for Research, Technological Development and Innovation (RTDI) — in 2000 it was the lowest in Europe.
- Establishment and continuous development of a coherent National Qualifications Framework which underpins a strategy of lifelong learning;
- Supporting the requirements of the labour market.

Social partnership agreements entered into by the government over this time period – i.e. *the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness* (PPF) (2000- 2002) and Sustaining Progress (2003-2005) (more particularly the former) explicitly referred to Lifelong Learning:

i) The PPF acknowledged lifelong learning as the key to a future of sustained economic growth and social development at a time of ongoing change and called for the development of a strategic framework for lifelong learning. Establishment of a Taskforce on Lifelong Learning.

ii) While *Sustaining Progress* specifically referred to '…still maintaining the promoting and investing in Lifelong Learning within available resources'. Work on implementing the recommendations of the Task Force on Lifelong Learning will be progressed as a strategic priority as resources permit.

iii) provision in the form of significant funding to be made available for the rapid expansion of adult literacy services.

iv) targets set for increasing the mature student intake from 2000-2005 and from 2006-2015.

Report on the Taskforce on Lifelong Learning (2002):

The Taskforce set out to develop a Strategic Framework of Lifelong Learning by mapping existing provisions, identifying gaps in those provisions and proposing solutions to fill those gaps. The establishment of the Taskforce derives from commitments in the PPF.

6. MAIN PATTERNS OF PROVISION AND PARTICIPATION (500)

> This section will
> - Provide a critical overview of patterns of provision and participation in LLL in Ireland
> - Explain, how have these patterns changed over the last approx. 10 years
> - Attend to and comment on the extent, and reliability of the data available:
>   - all sectors, *including* literacy, ICT, citizenship, access to higher education
>   - patterns of participation by gender
>   - extent and nature of funding (private and public) available for LLL

Adult literacy services are provided through the VECs, which employ Adult Literacy Organisers and staff, funded through the Department's Adult Literacy and Community Education budget. At the time of the publication of the OECD survey, the budget was €1m for the entire country, some 5000 learners were benefiting from the service, and unpaid volunteers gave 85% of all tuition.

Participation in the VTOS (Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme) have remained largely stable from 1996: 5,000 to 2000/2001: 5,489, 2001/2002: 5,708. The large increase was from 1989: 247. Roughly two-thirds female to one-third male.

Reliable figures on DES website from EU progress report Dec 2001.

Youthreach Dec 2003:

- 3,258 in the 76 Youthreach Centres

- 1,076 in the 28 S.T.T.Cs

- 2,700 in the 47 FAS funded Community Training Centres

Patterns of Participation Re: Literacy

Participation on adult literacy programmes has increased from 5,000 in 1997 to 22,733 at the end of December 2001. TV adult literacy and awareness programmes have been commissioned and broadcast on RTE, with the 2001 series of READ WRITE NOW attracting an average weekly audience of 235,000. A free-phone help line manned by trained tutors and free learner support materials supplement this TV programme. Videos of the series have been distributed to literacy schemes, Youthreach/Traveller and VTOS centres, public libraries and video outlets.

A joint FAS/VEC Return to Learning Programme that combined work experience within the Community Employment Scheme with intensive literacy tuition is also being expanded nationally.

Furthermore, a workplace literacy programme has been piloted successfully and is being extended to all local authority areas, in co-operation with LANPAG (the Local Authority National Partnership Board). A workplace literacy group with the key social partners and education and training agencies has recommended the establishment of a Workplace Literacy Fund.

Access to Higher Education

Despite the large increase in the numbers attending third level, there are still a number of socio-economic groups that are substantially under-represented. The Report of the Higher Education Authority (HEA) Action Group on access to third-level education (Osborne and Leith, 2000) determined that two out of the six socio-economic groups were particularly under-represented in Irish higher education Irish, namely the unskilled/agriculture workers and unskilled social class groups. The report recommended specific targets for participation for each of these groups up to 2006. While almost all social groups have experienced increases in participation since 1980, the greatest beneficiaries of the expansion of third-level opportunities have been the 'Higher Professionals', the 'Employers & Managers' and the 'Farmers' who recorded the greatest improvement in participation between 1980 and 1998. Conversely, the lower socio-economic groups remain disproportionately under-represented in third-level education. Data indicate that there has been little or no improvement in the proportion of third-level entrants from the lower socio-economic groups over the period 1991 to 2001. In fact, these data suggest that the 'Unskilled Manual Workers' constituted a smaller proportion of entrants in 2001 than they did in 1991. Within the university sector, the lower socio-economic groups represented an even smaller proportion of entrants in 2001 than they did in 1995. Lower socio-economic groups' persistent under-representation in higher education is, in many ways, a product of the high levels of attrition and under-performance among these groups through second-level education. However, even those who achieve a minimum threshold in the Leaving Certificate examination remain substantially less likely to transfer to higher education than their peers from higher socio-economic groups. For less well-off groups, economic considerations, especially the short-term opportunity costs of staying in education and not entering employment, become very significant at the point of transfer to higher education. This raises serious questions about the adequacy of the maintenance grant for those coming from low-income households.

Under the social inclusion measures in the NDP, there is provision for a Third Level Access Fund totalling €120m over the period 2000 to 2006, aimed at tackling under-representation by three target groups: -

- Students from disadvantaged backgrounds

- Mature students

- Students with disabilities

In addition the following major reports have been published: Access and Equity in Higher Education: An International Perspective (2000) The Report of the Action Group on Access to Third Level Education (2001) and Supporting Equity in Higher Education (2003), and the

National Development Plan has allocated very significant funding for 2000-2006 for a Third Level Access Fund.

Patterns of Participation By Age

Inadequate efforts to address the learning needs of older population groups. For example, whereas in the UK 27% of full-time students entering higher education are over the age of 23, in Ireland the equivalent figure in 2005 is circa 10%. The OECD average is just under 20%. Data from the Department of Education and Science indicate that while in the last decade participation in full-time courses by mature students has doubled, it still represents only 10% of the student population at third level institutions of education. The Irish higher education sector, thus, would appear to be very much the preserve of the young, predominantly Leaving Certificate qualified entrant. This does not reflect the experience of some other OECD countries, such as Sweden, where up to 38% of higher education entrants are over 25 years of age. The national target as set out is to see combined full-time and part-time participation of at least 30% mature students.

Patterns of Participation By Gender

Adult education and lifelong learning has traditionally been driven by a dynamic community-based women's education sector. A Women's Education Initiative was established in 1998 with assistance under the 1994 – 1999 Community Support Framework (CSF) to assist projects to address the current gaps in provision for educationally disadvantaged women. In the 2000 – 2006 Operational Programme this measure has been broadened into an Education Equality Initiative focussing on both disadvantaged women and men, in view of the under-representation of men in adult education generally, and the particular difficulties experienced in attracting disadvantaged older men. The Green Paper notes that 80% of community education participants are women and there is now recognition of the need for distinct outreach strategies to motivate men to participate in adult education (Owens 2000).

Patterns of Participation by ICT

Although the White Paper addresses Distance Learning and accepts that there is a "robust demand" for this form of educational participation with a growth of 198% in the nine years from 1988 to 1997 there has been little expansion done in this area with just two major institutions Dublin City University and the OSCAIL programme and the Open University. There are private colleges also providing distance learning but with varying standards. With this in mind it is believed to be imperative that the scope for distance learning provision be used to full advantage but nonetheless, there has been little push in the provision of Distance Learning. Also the expansion of workplace literacy initiatives in

collaboration with industry is envisaged. The concern expressed by some organisations is that workplace education is overly economically driven.

IT 2000 was a major investment programme, on the part of the Department of Education and Science, launched in 1999 to provide funding for software, hardware and computerised school administration. In addition, the Teaching Skills Initiative (TSI) provides ICT training for teachers. Approximately 50,000 training places have been provided. The overall aim of TSI is to allow teachers to develop a skills/training continuum, which will allow them to progress in a structured way from novice to expert-user of ICTs.

Patterns of Participation byEthnicity

According to the State census (2002), 18% of Irish male Travellers and 20.5% of Irish female Travellers aged 15 years or over were still involved in education in 2002. 39.7% of Irish Travellers aged 15 years and over left school under 15 years of age

With regard to refugees and asylum seekers, the White Paper states that refugees are entitled to the same access to education and training as Irish nationals. Arrangements have been introduced in primary and secondary levels to provide additional teaching resources for the increasing numbers of children for whom English is not their first language. With regard to adults, a Refugee Language Support Unit has been established in TCD to co-ordinate language assessment and tuition on a national basis. Unfortunately, the White Paper concedes that asylum seekers are not in a position to access these services and makes proposals that would include asylum seekers with entitlement to work be eligible for these services without prejudice to the determination reached on their asylum status.

7. BROADER SOCIAL POLICY AND LIFELONG LEARNING

This section will
- reveal extent to which issues of broader social policy (for example: employment policy, social security policy, community development policy) have been incorporated into LLL in Ireland and
- comment on the relative impact of these policies in relation to:
  - Gender
  - Social disadvantage
  - Ethnicity
  - Religion
  - Age
  - Any other areas of specific importance in Ireland.

The Irish Statutory Committee on Educational Disadvantage (2005) 'proposes a new strategy that places the solutions to educational disadvantage within an inclusive lifelong learning framework' and recognise that 'the adult and community education sector has been very active in pushing the boundaries and in promoting systemic change'. An example of community development policy is The Shanty Project, Tallaght, Dublin involving largely women centred in the community of Tallaght West, in the top 1% of most disadvantaged areas in Ireland. The vast majority are lone parents and social welfare recipients, including some asylum seekers. Most left the formal educational system at a very young age, some not even reaching secondary school. 450 participants in 23 classes (average size 15 in a class) per year. Learner-centred curricula created by the learners and the tutors, with even the accredited programmes being learner centred. A full counselling service is provided with approximately 35% of the course participants having accessed the counselling dimension also. They work closely with local drug projects and work with methadone users (age 17-25) in providing personal development and education. Their starting point is courses on Personal Development and Communication Skills, Basic Literacy and Numeracy Training. These courses allow participants, the majority of who left school at 14/15 years, to proceed in a carefully planned progression route to mainstream education, training or employment. A second group of courses reflect the needs of the local community for training in leadership e.g. training for community drug workers and estate management courses. These courses have been developed at the bequest of local community groups. These courses allow a process of empowerment, people are encouraged to access and voice their own education and training needs thereby supporting people to take control of their own lives as individuals and communities. The third series of courses they run allows people to access further education. Some of their past students have gone on to third level Colleges and Universities, gaining certificates, diplomas and degrees. The fourth strand of courses have, as their immediate goal, retraining for employment, their state of the art computer centre will allow further courses to up skill long term unemployed people for employment. Their proximity to City West Business Campus, which will employ 12,000 people, allows them ready access to a potential job market.

Gender:

Gender Equality Unit was established in June 2001 under the Equal Opportunities Promotion and Monitoring measure of the NDP. The Equality Unit is currently establishing its strategy, which includes creating awareness of gender equality among all the stakeholders in the education system, including the staff of the DES. It provides a support and advisory service on mainstreaming equality between women and men –(gender mainstreaming). They believe that equality of opportunity between women and men, between girls and boys, now affects the lives of every person who comes into contact with the education system.

Central to women's learning opportunities/participation in lifelong learning is the issue of childcare (cf. Childcare and Adult Education, Aontas, 2003). Highlighted flexible needs-based childcare support for adult learners as key to participation – growing difficulty with cost of insurance, access to appropriate premises/facilities and availability to trained childcare personnel.

 'Locally based education groups through providing safe and accessible childcare attracted many women who could not otherwise participate in education' (Women's Education Network development Initiative 1998-2000, p.4). AONTAS recommends that adequate, affordable and accessible childcare should be an integral part of funded programmes and not an add-on or an afterthought (Aontas, 2003, p. 4).

Owens (2000) observes that some men's groups serve as a 'gateway to education' through linking men to relevant programmes and supporting them through the process rather than offering education in its own right. To engage marginalized men, Owens (2000) emphasises the importance of counsellors to provide emotional support for participants and identifies programme participants as key resource to motivate other marginalised people to participate in adult education

Ethnicity:

- Two- pronged strategy to increase inclusion by working with Traveller parents, addressing the deficit of their information and understanding of the education system and increasing the involvement of Traveller parents in school and parent organisations and, secondly, reducing exclusion by working with settled parents and structures, acknowledging the impact they can have on Traveller access and participation in school and their potential for excluding Travellers.

- Senior Traveller Training Centres (STTC) provides a basic compensatory education for Travellers from 15 upward in their 33 centres nationwide. They aim to provide Travellers with the knowledge, skills and attitudes required to make the transition to work and adult life and to participate successfully in their communities.

- Traveller girls tend to marry at a very young age, Forkan (2005) notes that 'many girls would be interested in returning to education…postmarriage' for 'topics as literacy, arts and craft, Junior Cert and childcare courses'. He also not notes the

increased number of Traveller grandmothers taking adult education classes and recommends need for schools to try and implement an integrated system for working with Traveller parents as the provision of literacy classes or general adult education classes would further help Traveller parents to help their own children's education. Other key issues to engage Travellers include the need for promotion of role models by local support agencies for other Travellers and the need to meet transport costs to enable those to attend classes

- Provides ESOL classes to asylum seekers and immigrants.

- The Refugee language Support Unit was established in Trinity College in 1999 which has completed benchmarks for English Language proficiency for school-going and asylum seeking children. All adult refugees presenting for English Language   Tuition are assessed and assigned to appropriate classes. A register of English language tuition providers is maintained. The pilot phase of the Refugee Language Support Unit has been successfully completed and has been replaced on a more permanent basis by an organisation called Integrate Ireland language and Training Ltd. This Unit operates on behalf of the Department of Education and Science under the aegis of Trinity College. It will continue the work of the pilot unit. It is also providing training on an on-going basis for teachers involved with non-national pupils as well as delivering English language teaching to adult refugees, developing further teaching materials and carrying out research.

Age

U3A is a co-operative learning model for older people. It began in France in the 1970s and has spread worldwide. The word 'university' in this context comes medieval times meaning a gathering or co-operative. Members design their own programme of activities to suit their own needs. They hosted a seminar in Dublin in November 2005 entitled "Lifelong Learning and Older People; Contexts and Challenges." U3A is supported by Age Action Ireland and funded by the Department of Education and Science.

Social Disadvantage:

The Irish Statutory Committee on Educational Disadvantage (2005) 'proposes a new strategy that places the solutions to educational disadvantage within an inclusive lifelong learning framework' and recommend need to 'build partnerships between school-based and community based education' and to 'make the school a focal point of community education'.

Social disadvantage is closely related to educational disadvantage and as such, attempts to alleviate both take similar tactics. If the perceived wisdom is that one of the routes out of poverty is education then it must follow that Lifelong Learning is vital from 'cradle to grave'. Tackling social/educational disadvantage begins at pre-school level, incorporating research and initiatives around early start programmes, in and out of school supports,

school completion programmes. Post compulsory school initiatives include back to education initiatives; Senior Traveller Training Centres; Youthreach; VTOS; Education Adult Guidance Service; Education Equality Initiative; Community Education Programmes and special initiatives for disadvantaged adults. Other initiatives include homeless, asylum, disability, drug and court initiatives. The National Educational Welfare Board, established in 2001 includes representatives from the education partners and State Agencies with the emphasis on assistance to schools, families and children rather than penalties.

The Educational Disadvantage Committee – provided for in Section 32 of the Education Act – advises the Minister on policies and strategies to be adopted to identify and correct educational disadvantage. The Committee includes in its membership a number of people from voluntary and other bodies who have objectives or experience in the area of tackling disadvantage.

A joint FAS/VEC Return to Learning Programme, which combined work experience within the Community Employment Scheme with intensive literacy tuition, is also being expanded nationally.

A workplace literacy programme has been piloted successfully and is being extended to all local authority areas, in co-operation with LANPAG (the Local Authority National Partnership Board). A workplace literacy group with the key social partners and education and training agencies has recommended the establishment of a Workplace Literacy Fund.

Addressing Specific Learning Difficulties:

The National Learning Network/BUA Centre provides assessment and support for adolescents and adults with specific learning difficulties such as Dyslexia and Dyspraxia. Staff at the centre also provide functional strategies and support for other associated specific processing/learning difficulties such as Asperger's Syndrome and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. The NLN/BUA Centre promotes inclusive education nationally through its unique screening facility together with comprehensive educational, vocational and functional activity support services for third level students and adult learners with Specific Processing/Learning Difficulties.

8. EFFECTIVENESS OF LIFELONG LEARNING POLICIES

> This section explores what evidence is there (*for example*, statistics on participation) on whether LLL (or equivalent) policies in Ireland are achieving:
> - Their state dobjectives, and/or
> - The objectives of international LLL policies (from EU, OECD)

Increased Participation

Approximately 300,000 adults take part in both formal and informal education each year in Ireland. Statistics compiled and published by AONTAS, the National Association of Adult Education, show the various categories in which these adults participate (See Appendix 1). The figures cited for 2005 show an increase of approximately 30,000 individuals, representing a 10% rise in the numbers of adults participating in lifelong learning initiatives when compared to figures collated in 2004. However, it must be noted, that these are approximate figures compiled annually by AONTAS as no comprehensive national database of statistics for participation in adult and community education is currently available.

FAS, Youthreach and STTC's have been particularly effective with regard to participation of Travellers according to the following statistics:

- FAS: In 2004 there were 400 Travellers registered with FAS employment services.

- Youthreach: In December 2004, 325 Travellers enrolled.

STTCs (Senior Traveller Training Centres):   In December 2004: 33 centres; 981 trainees over 15 of which 799 female and 182 male. Of these, 248 were under 18 with the majority aged between 18 and 45.

However, there is a lack of statistics for FAS and Youthreach regarding immigrants.

Infra-Structural Developments

Some of the infra-structural developments which have taken place since 2000 and which are resulting in increased participation in lifelong learning within the formal education sector include:

- Designation of a Minister for State with responsibility for Adult Education –to drive the lifelong learning agenda at the cabinet table.

- The establishment of the National Education Welfare Board NEWB to address early school leaving

- The implementation of the National Framework of Qualifications (2003)

- The establishment of the National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education under the auspices of the HEA to facilitate and monitor participation of under-represented groups in third level education.

In relation to impacting positively on participation in the non-formal and informal sectors the following developments are seen as fundamental:

- The work on the ground of Community Education Facilitators whose role, in actively encouraging and promoting links between both formal and informal education providers, is to help create a positive learning experience for adults engaged in community education.

- Adult Education Guidance Initiative – provision of adult student support in the form of guidance/counselling

- NALA's development of the Evolving Quality Framework (EQF) for Adult Basic Education as the general framework for improving the quality of literacy provision in Ireland.

- AONTAS is also in the process of developing its Quality Assurance Framework for Women's Community Education in order to heighten visibility of the important work engaged in by its women's groups; to support them and to demonstrate the uniqueness of their work and to provide a quality benchmark for it.

Increased Dedicated Funding

2005 saw some €138million expenditure by the Irish government dedicated to adult and further education. The HEA strategic initiative scheme to promote access increased from €3million in 2000 to €7.3m in 2005.

In relation to adult literacy, since publication of the IALS survey, the provision in the education sector for adult literacy has increased from a base of €1.079m in 1997 through €16.476m in 2002. Overall €93.4m has been committed to this area across the 6 years of the NDP, with a target of reaching 113,000 clients.

These infra-structural developments and designated funding allow agencies/organisations and institutions to provide sustainable core services and build capacity in relation to lifelong learning both within the organisation and for its learners and learning community.

9. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

▪ This section states views on any policy implications or areas for further investigation

It is widely acknowledged that lifelong learning has an important role in addressing the issues of poverty and disadvantage. Incumbent on the Irish Government and the relevant stakeholders in lifelong learning in Ireland to ensure that - lifelong learning, does not in fact lead to more inequality in that the advantages accruing from participation in further education and training are disproportionately available to those which are already better educated and therefore, better able to afford to pay for such participation.

- More family literacy work needed. The Irish Statutory Committee on Educational Disadvantage (2005) highlight the need for 'a dedicated family literacy budget'

- Fees issue for part-time students is a significant barrier to participation in higher education. Currently students entering 'conventional courses' within third level education via the CAO application system do not pay fees, while part-time courses including modular degree courses and distance learning courses incur full fees. This militates against flexible provisions/supports for mature students

- workplace education needs to be expanded; the Statutory Committee on Educational Disadvantage (2005) notes that 'Ireland lags behind other industrialised countries in having no legislative basis for paid educational leave to enable people to gain qualifications later in life, having been educationally disadvantaged in their earlier years'

- need for a more adequately funded and comprehensive community arts strategy where the arts are integrated with literacy needs so as to help overcome adults fear of failure

- more provision for non-English speaking (need for country specific materials) adults and for a medium term State strategy to develop community leaders representing ethnic minorities, including Travellers ;

- need for an integrated cross-generational approach to the education of the Travelling community, including grandparents, parents, secondary and primary children and more consultation between Travellers and third level institutions to improve access of Travellers to third level

- There is a need for State institutions to have written policies/proofing on how they plan to overcome the barriers from differences of socio/economic, ethnicity (including Travellers), disability and gender.

- there is a need to ensure specific strategies for integration of Travellers into mainstream options other than Youthreach and the STTC programmes – awareness training, culturally relevant programmes and materials, an inter-cultural anti-racist curriculum, supporting services such as guidance and childcare and

outreach networking and dialogue with Traveller organisations and individuals concerning the delivery of programmes

- more distance education needed;

- the good practice of local schools being sites for learning for adults needs to be extended more consistently nationally

- the curriculum at secondary level needs to be more learner-centred and aware of adult education/lifelong learning principles;

- Learners with low literacy levels overlooked in the definition of Adult Education in the White Paper; possible exclusion of learners on proposed National Adult Learning Council (NALC) (not yet established);

- low community sector representation, lack of learner and volunteer representation on the relevant boards; clarification needed on precise relationship between the proposed NALC with local VEC literacy services; increased bureaucracy and danger of consultation overload; NALC's lack of a resourcing function a major weakness.

- lack of reference to literacy training as a form of Community Education a major weakness- it should be explicitly noted that literacy education has strong links to community education in its ethos etc.

- Need for speedier implementation of the White Paper and increased proportion of education budget to lifelong learning

- There is no master concept of lifelong learning to be found among the many policy documents

- White Paper's aim to develop formally recognised qualifications for teaching and practice, particularly those with no qualifications, might deter people from volunteering; also might undermine those with no formal education credentials;

- lack of clarity in White Paper about timeframe and plans for development of dedicated career paths for practitioners; lack of explicit intent to involve volunteers in proposed Forum of Practitioners (not yet established);

- The reinstatement of the National Adult Learning Council (NALC) post haste - needed to promote and co-ordinate the development of the sector.

- More follow through with the Local Adult Learning Boards for local lifelong learning needs prioritised. Recommend that local and regional structures would have more autonomy regarding budgets

- lack of assessment for Lifelong Learning;

- Given the prominence of the education disadvantage (now educational inclusion) agenda for our Government's funding strategies to target disadvantage across the educational spectrum (almost half a billion euros designated for 2005) – there is a

need to strengthen research links between educational disadvantage and lifelong learning

- Increased childcare/Eldercare

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Table 1. Participation in Adult Education in Ireland.

Scheme	Numbers	Date	Source
Literacy Schemes	34,000	December 2004	National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) www.nala.ie
Senior Traveller Training Centres (STTCs)	1,485	December 2004	National Co-ordination Unit for STTCs www.sttc.ie
Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS)	5,538	January 2005	VTOS www.ncte.ie/vtos
Youthreach	4,753	December 2004	Youthreach www.youthreach.ie
Post Leaving Cert Courses (PLCs)	28,588	March 2005	IVEA www.ivea.ie
Community Education	40,000+ participants in womens' groups	2004	AONTAS Estimate
Back to Education Initiative (BTEI)- Formal and Informal Strand	9,835	December 2003	Dept.of Education and Science (DES) www.education.ie
Mature students aged 23+ yrs - Undergraduate students entering HEA third level for the first time	19,445	January 2003	HEA www.hea.ie
Night-time / evening courses	147,000	2000	White Paper, Department of Education & Science (DES) www.education.ie
Distance Learning - Oscail	2,500	2005	Oscail Handbook 2005 www.oscail.ie
Total			**302,722+**

*Source: www.aontas.com/information/statistics.html

GENERAL CONTEXT OF THE LLL 2010 RESEARCH PROJECT

In March 2000, the then 15 European leaders committed the European Union to become by 2010 "the most dynamic and competitive knowledge based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion, and respect for the environment". The Lisbon strategy, as it has come to be known, was a comprehensive but interdependent series of reforms, which has significant implications for a whole range of social policies, including policies for learning.

As part of the Lisbon strategy, the European Union has set the goal of raising the number of adults participating in lifelong learning to 12.5% by 2010. However, the proportion of learning adults in Europe differs widely across countries. The project **"Towards a Lifelong Learning Society in Europe: the contribution of the education system"**, which forms part of the European Commission's 6th Framework Research Program, is dedicated to identifying the reasons behind these differences and to studying the policies and practices related to adults' participation in and access to lifelong learning in a number of European countries (see project's web-page http:// LLL2010.tlu.ee).

The project involves researchers from thirteen countries and regions of Europe: Scotland, England, Ireland, Austria, Belgium, Slovenia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Lithuania, Hungary, Bulgaria, Norway and Russia.

Project objectives

The objectives of this project are to:

- Show to what extent the countries differ in terms of patterns of lifelong learning.
- Reveal how these differences depend upon specific institutions and policies of each country.
- Assess the contribution of each country's education system to the development of lifelong learning.
- Trace the ways institutional and policy prerequisites for lifelong learning have been developed in European countries.
- Identify the barriers to participation in lifelong learning in terms of policies, educational institutions, enterprises' practices and potential learners' motivation.
- Identify the best solutions and most successful practices in terms of participation in lifelong learning and to decide to what extent these would be applicable in other countries.
- Propose changes, which would enhance adult participation in lifelong learning and decrease social exclusion.

The LLL2010 research project extends over five years (commencing in September 2005), and these questions will be addressed in various ways through five sub-projects.

Potential impact

Project is expected to contribute both to competitiveness and cohesion of the EU by (a) developing and carrying out a joint agenda for a better understanding of the tensions between the knowledge-based society, lifelong learning and social inclusion in the context of enlargement of the EU and globalisation, (b) identification of best practices and suggestion of ways for implementation in order to reach the objectives for lifelong learning. The LLL2010 research project extends over five years (commencing in September 2005), and these questions will be addressed in various ways through five sub-projects.

The plan for disseminating the knowledge

The project aims to examine and report on national differences in approaching formal lifelong learning, but also to assist policymakers and practitioners in learning appropriate lessons from contrasting practice in other countries. Therefore, disseminating knowledge to relevant audiences – individuals, institutional actors and policymakers – is of the core issues within this project, and so dissemination activity will take place throughout the life of the project.

The preliminary results will be discussed in the workshops and conferences and introduced to national as well as international audiences. The results of the different research projects within LLL2010 will be presented in five comparative reports – one per subproject – and a final report, and two books will be published as a result of the project. A Conference "The Contribution of the Education System to Lifelong Learning", scheduled in the end of the project, is aimed at discussing findings, conclusions and expert opinions on a European level.

To contribute to scientific discussion and enhance comparative studies in the field, further analysis of the results of the research will take place in articles published in specialized and interdisciplinary journals. As LLL2010 will undertake a number of original studies, the data, questionnaires and codebooks, and all the other relevant materials generated in the project will be made available to the scientific community at large.

Results achieved

The present summary covers the findings of the team during the first Sub-project, 'Review of Literature and Policy Documents'; the full comparative report of the results of this Subproject will be made available on the project website by the end of 2007. The Sub-project undertook comparative research on lifelong learning policies and practices. The aim was to review how lifelong learning is being conceptualised and put into operation across a range of countries in Northern, Central and Eastern Europe.

Purpose & Methodology of Sub-project 1

The purpose of the first Sub-project was to review how lifelong learning is being conceptualised and put into operation across a range of countries in Northern, Central and Eastern Europe. The nature of the educational and lifelong learning regimes in each country, and how they are changing, were investigated. The report considers how far lifelong learning has entered the policy rhetoric in each country, and in what forms it has done so – in particular, how far it has been shaped by the European Union's thinking, or by national or other influences. It considers how far rhetoric and practice diverge in each

country. It also considers how far actions of different areas of policy and government support lifelong learning, or hinder its development.

The Sub-project applied a comparative documentary analysis of approaches to lifelong learning, through analyzing national policy documents and addressing lifelong learning in participating countries.

Research Institutions in LLL2010 Consortium

1. Institute for International and Social Studies, Tallinn University, Estonia
2. Higher Institute for Labour Studies, Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium
3. University of Nottingham, England, United Kingdom
4. Moray House School of Education, University of Edinburgh, Scotland, United Kingdom
5. Educational Disadvantage Centre, Centre for Human Development at St. Patrick's College, Dublin City University, Ireland
6. Fafo Institute for Labour and Social Research, Oslo, Norway
7. Slovenian Institute for Adult Education, Ljubljana, Slovenia
8. TÁRKI Social Research Centre, Budapest, Hungary
9. Centre for International Relations and Studies, Mykolo Romerio University, Vilnius, Lithuania
10. Institute of Sociology, Bukarest, Bulgaria
11. St. Petersburg State University: Department of Sociology, Department of Retraining and Improvement of Professional Skills for Sociology and Social Work, Russia
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