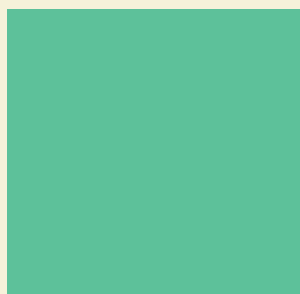
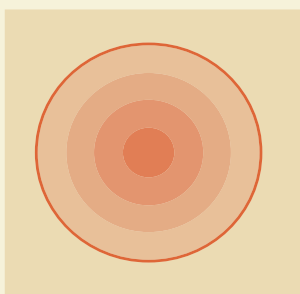
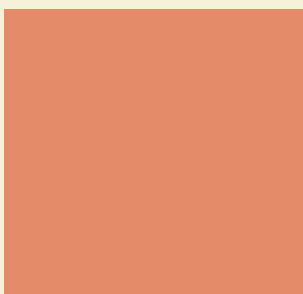
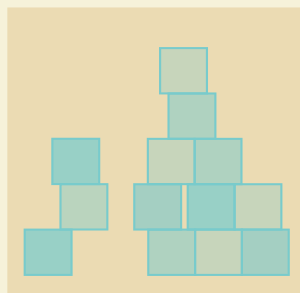
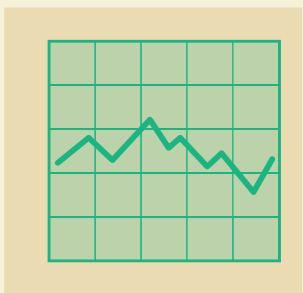
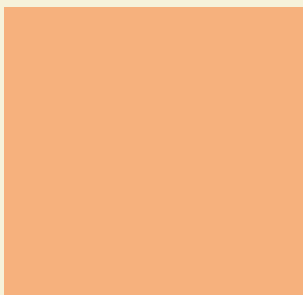
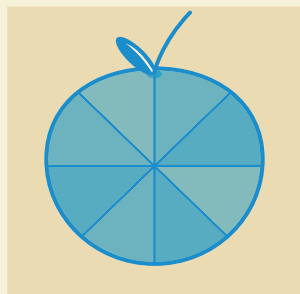
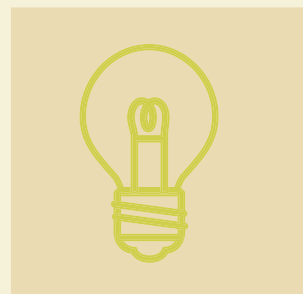
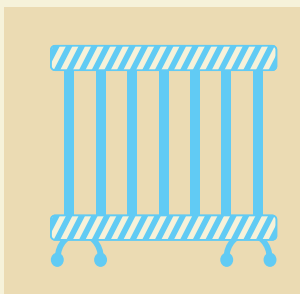


# EQUALITY IN A TIME OF CHANGE

Conference Papers 2007–2009

Mainstreaming equality in further education, training and labour market programmes



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**Equality in a Time of Change**  
**Mainstreaming equality in further education,**  
**training and labour market programmes**

**2009 Conference Proceedings (including  
a selection of papers from 2007 and 2008)**

Proceedings of conferences co-hosted by the  
Equality Authority, the Department of Education  
and Science and the Department of Enterprise,  
Trade and Employment

10 November 2009

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<b>Foreword</b> .....	03
<b>Speaker Biographies</b> .....	04
<b>2009</b>	
<b>Promoting Equality through Lifelong Learning</b> Prof. John Field <i>University of Stirling, Scotland</i> .....	06
<b>Inequality and Discrimination in the Irish Labour Market</b> Dr. Helen Russell <i>Economic and Social Research Institute</i> .....	14
<b>Bringing Equality to the Centre: Mainstreaming Equality and the VEC Sector</b> Fiona Hartley <i>County Wicklow VEC</i> .....	26
<b>The Great ESCape: A Light in the Education Tunnel</b> Eddie Higgins <i>EQUAL Ireland</i> .....	32
<b>Building Community-Based Access to Education: Millennium Partnership Fund</b> Siobhán O'Dowd <i>Pobal</i> .....	36
<b>2008</b>	
<b>Equality and Diversity in Education</b> Dr. Ted Fleming <i>NUI Maynooth</i> .....	40
<b>Making Common Sense of Equalities: Some Practical Approaches and Examples</b> Dr. Chris Jude <i>Education Consultant</i> .....	44
<b>Engaging Inclusive Learning: Shaping Equality Best Practice in Vocational Education and Training</b> Dr. Alan Bruce <i>Universal Learning Systems</i> .....	54
<b>2007</b>	
<b>Challenges for the Further Education and Vocational Training Sector: the Needs of an Increasingly Diverse Workplace of the Future</b> Peter Cassells National Centre for Partnership and Performance .....	64
<b>Mainstreaming Equality in KES</b> Barney O'Reilly <i>Kerry Education Service</i> .....	70

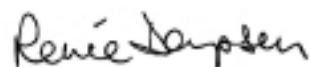
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## Foreword

Access to education and a learner's experience while in education can have a major influence on his or her subsequent life chances, particularly if that person is from a marginalised group. Getting the chance to access education and to have a positive educational experience are vital first steps towards good quality employment. Consequently, the education sector has a crucial role to play in combating inequality and in overcoming the barriers which prevent people from accessing or remaining in education. Action by education providers to create a pro-equality culture can help to enhance the quality of life enjoyed by those such as lone parents, members of the Traveller community, people with disabilities, who currently experience disadvantages in Irish society. The benefits for such learners from a proactive approach by education providers can be immense. However, the benefits are not restricted to learners alone. Proactive action in favour of equality can also deliver benefits to the education provider itself in the form of higher staff morale, enhanced reputation among learners and better targeting of resources.

The Equality Authority is pleased to have worked closely with a series of education partners to develop good practice specifically designed for the vocational education and training sectors. "Equality in a Time of Change" brings together the papers presented at a conference on this theme organised by the Equality Authority, the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment in November 2009. It also contains a number of papers presented at previous conferences held in 2007 and 2008. These papers outline why equality matters in the vocational education and training sectors and how a pro-equality culture can be achieved. As such, this report is intended as a resource for providers of further education and training who seek to embed a focus on equality, diversity and non-discrimination in their organisational policies, practices and procedures.

The papers in this publication explore the themes of promoting equality in lifelong learning, combating inequality/discrimination in the labour market and accommodating diversity and non-discrimination in the further education and training sector. They present practical examples of implementing equality mainstreaming approaches within organisations responsible for delivering further education and training to a diversity of learners. We are grateful to the authors for their insightful papers and to the organisations featured for their contribution to furthering the theme of equality mainstreaming in further education and training.



Renee Dempsey  
CEO  
Equality Authority

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## Speakers Biographies

**Dr. Alan BRUCE** is Director of Universal Learning Systems (ULS) – an international consultancy firm in research, education, training and project management. ULS undertakes projects in the educational, development and management sectors. He is Adjunct Professor in Rehabilitation Counselling with The University of Wisconsin and Senior Research Fellow at The University of Edinburgh.

**Peter CASSELLS** was the Chairperson of the National Centre for Partnership and Performance (NCPP), which promoted and facilitated workplace change and innovation through partnership. As General Secretary of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions from 1989 to 2001, he was one of the main architects of the National Social Partnership agreements.

**Prof. John FIELD** is Professor of Lifelong Learning and Co-Director of the Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning, University of Stirling, Scotland, where he directs the Master/Diploma in Education Research. Much of his work has involved developing second chance opportunities for non-traditional learners, as well as researching a range of aspects of adult learning.

**Dr. Ted FLEMING** is the Director of the Centre for Research in Adult Learning and Education at NUI Maynooth. He was the Adult Education Organiser for County Louth VEC before becoming a lecturer at Dundalk IT. His research reports have covered areas such as early school leaving, access to university, older adults and an international study of factors impacting on retention/drop out among mature students in higher education.

**Fiona HARTLEY** is the Chief Executive Officer of County Wicklow VEC. She was Education Officer in County Dublin VEC from 1999 to 2006 and prior to that was Principal of a Further Education College in City of Dublin VEC.

**Eddie HIGGINS** is the Executive Director of EQUAL Ireland. As a trade union official (SIPTU), he has been involved in bringing flexible accredited education to the workplace over a number of years.

**Dr. Chris JUDE** is an Education Consultant. Head of Widening Participation for the UK's National Health Service University from 2003 to 2005, she has worked in adult and community learning, further and higher education, trade union education and with schools, principally on lifelong and widening participation.

**Siobhán O'DOWD** is the Co-ordinator of the Millennium Partnership Fund at Pobal. Prior to joining Pobal in 2001, she worked in the fields of community development, local development, adult education and community education, in a variety of sectors, both as a practitioner and as a trainer.

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**Barney O'REILLY** is Chief Executive Officer of the Kerry Education Service (KES), the VEC in Kerry, where an equality review was undertaken in 2004 to research the management and implementation of equality issues and to define objectives for the implementation of an equality action plan in relation to KES employees and in the provision of educational services to its students.

**Dr. Helen RUSSELL** is an Associate Research Professor at the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI). She is the Joint Programme Manager of the ESRI/Equality Authority Research Programme on Equality and Discrimination. In addition to equality issues, her research interests include family, the labour market, poverty and social exclusion. She has researched these topics in Ireland and in a comparative European context.

# Promoting Equality through Lifelong Learning

**Prof. John Field**  
*University of Stirling*





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## **Introduction**

I would like to talk about recent policies around lifelong learning – not just in Ireland but also at the European level, and the strong links and connections between lifelong learning and social cohesion. The researcher in me wants to know immediately what evidence we have on the relationship between lifelong learning and equality. If people go off and do a class in IT skills, in the Irish language or in Byzantine history, what evidence do we have that this will have any impact upon their lives? So, we have to look first at what kind of impact lifelong learning has and what evidence does exist.

We do have now, from the UK, some very good evidence of that impact, coming from a number of longitudinal and cohort studies, which I will summarise. The evidence is that the impact by and large appears to be very positive in a number of life domains. We also need to look at whether lifelong learning contributes to greater equality or to greater inequality. There is a possibility that it does contribute to greater inequality where participation in lifelong learning is unequal. In the case of Ireland, I would like to present some evidence that suggests that there is very considerable inequality. Those inequalities are not distinctive to Ireland and can be seen in many other countries, including the Nordic nations, Germany and Britain.

A lively debate has been triggered in Britain by a couple of recent studies on health and social inequality, the findings of which have been brought together in an influential, and rather controversial, book by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett (2009). These studies show that at population level, all other things being equal, there appears to be a link between health and inequality of income but also that the more unequal the society, the more trouble all of its members have with poor health. I repeat, all of its members. So, an unequal society, a society of inequalities, great income inequalities, will also tend to be an unhealthy society.

Scotland is a great country but its health data are absolutely horrendous and it does appear to fit this hypothesis that social inequality and income inequality are linked with overall poor levels of health for all members of society, not just for the poorest. I would like to use some of that analysis and apply it to lifelong learning and participation in lifelong learning to see if there is any similar link and to consider the implications for policy and practice.

## **Wage Inequality and Social Mobility**

There have been a number of studies based on longitudinal and particularly cohorts data, of a type that is particularly rich in the UK. Cohort studies typically follow a group of people born in a particular year. The most recent group is looking at the millennium cohort, a bunch of babies born in 2000, and is coming up with some very interesting findings indeed. The problem with longitudinal studies methodologically is that they are always retrospective, always looking at the past and can never tell exactly what is happening at this very minute.

The data I will be referring to mostly come from the 1958 cohort – a group of people born in 1958 and followed up at periodical intervals so that you can allow for all sorts of other differences in the qualities and attributes and behaviours of people in order to find out what difference things make over time. One of the key questions is what difference does it make to people's

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life-chances if they participate in learning. This group looked at people who had participated in learning between 1991 and 2000 (Vignoles *et al.*, 2004).

Workers – that is those who were in work at both points, 1991 and 2000 – who took any type of training during this period experienced higher wage growth than those who had not, all other things being equal. As far as we can tell, training does appear to contribute straightforwardly to higher wage growth. And those who were unemployed in 1991 experienced wage scarring – that is the long-term impact or the scar that unemployment leaves behind on people's lives. This scarring appears to be pretty substantial – wage scarring among those thirty-three-year-olds in 1991 was 11 per cent lower for people who had taken educational qualifications in the intervening period, all other things being equal (Gregg and Tominey, 2005).

There is also very recent evidence on social mobility – that is the extent to which people change career for the better. You can measure social mobility in a number of ways. This series of studies essentially looked at the cohort data, the longitudinal surveys and British household panel survey and found that people who engaged in what they defined as later life investment in education found that it did make a difference to their occupation (Hatch *et al.*, 2007). So, it does not just affect whether you are in work or out of work or whether you enjoy high wages or lower wages, it also affects your social status. People who engaged in education moved up a grade in occupation.

Interestingly, the impact of this did not seem to vary between ethnic groups on the basis of the British data. The numbers involved in the research are relatively small so what you may have is what appears to be a generic ethnic effect, which results from the patterns of one of the largest single groups, ethnic Indians, who appear to be a migration success story, particularly Sikhs.

The evidence at the moment is that although the impact does not appear to vary by ethnic group, it does appear to vary by gender but in rather complicated ways and it does vary significantly by age. An obvious reflection of human capital investment is then that older workers who invest in their skills still have a much more limited 'shelf life' than younger workers, who are obviously going to be in the labour market for much longer.

The other aspect of social mobility relates to the impact of parental involvement. If we look at cycles of low aspiration, low attainment, poverty and relative inequality, one of the possible interventions to break out of this cycle is to support what people are doing within the family. There is reasonably good evidence that proves that parental involvement in schooling, regardless of other factors, is a very powerful predictor of young people's attainment within school. More parental involvement by and large means better performance.

One UK study suggested also that parental involvement trumps social class, which is consistent with Norwegian studies among migrant children that show that social capital – as a particular study conceptualised socio-capital family involvement and family support – is more significant than social class among migrant children in Norwegian schools (Lauglo, 2000). This point, for me, is complicated because parental involvement sadly appears to be strongly correlated with social class. Socio-economic groups that are less advantaged are much less likely to be very actively involved in their children's schooling. However, there is good evidence that investing in parental involvement produces some positive results.

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## Social Impact of Participation in Education

Social capital is usually conceived in terms of civic associations and participation in voluntary organisations of various kinds including faith groups. There is some evidence from Leon Feinstein and his colleagues at the University of London, who found, interestingly, that participation in general adult education – whether the class is in historical studies or basket weaving – is associated with a higher level of voting (Feinstein *et al.*, 2003). There is also abundant evidence that taking part in adult education is associated with increased involvement in voluntary organisations (Field, 2005). That finding cuts both ways: the more active people are in voluntary organisations and civic associations of all kinds, including faith groups, the more likely they are to take part in adult learning, all other things being equal. Equally, those who take part in adult learning are more likely to become involved in civic associations.

Conversely, people with low literacy and numeracy levels are at a high risk of social isolation. This is particularly significant in societies where so much communication and public communication requires high levels of literacy and numeracy competence (and this includes IT competence). The British system has moved very dramatically towards e-government and e-government is associated with being able to access all kinds of services and products online.

There is a lot of research showing that low literacy and numeracy skills are also associated with a propensity to becoming negatively involved in the criminal justice system. A Scottish study shows again that participation in literacy and numeracy programmes appears to have positive effects. In this study, carried out by Lynn Tett and Kathy Maclachlan (2007), there was clear evidence that people who take literacy and numeracy courses became not only more confident as a result, but also are more likely to go out, to identify someone they can turn to for help and to get involved in community activity.

Incidentally, the confidence levels of participants in adult education are one of the strongest findings of both research and practice. Practitioners will persistently tell you that one of the signs they see among learners is that growth in confidence as a result of learning. The Scottish study also refers to learners showing greater self-efficacy, in other words a greater degree of control over their lives or a greater feeling of control over their lives.

I would like to look very briefly at some work that Leon Feinstein and his colleagues did at the University of London (Feinstein *et al.*, 2003). They showed that leisure courses had a quite remarkable effect on tolerance of racial difference. I was surprised by this as I cannot really think of any obvious reason why this should be so. The effect is quite high – unusually high actually – although it seems to be the case that those with extreme views carry on holding those extreme views. It appears that among those who had relatively casual levels of prejudice and racism, these levels reduced following participation in adult learning.

There is some very persuasive research at population level, using nation as the basis for comparison, that those nations with the greatest skills equality for literacy and numeracy on something called the International Adult Literacy Survey have the least divergence between the top performers and the bottom performers in their system and that these were the Nordic nations. Those with the greatest levels of inequality were Ireland, the United States and Britain

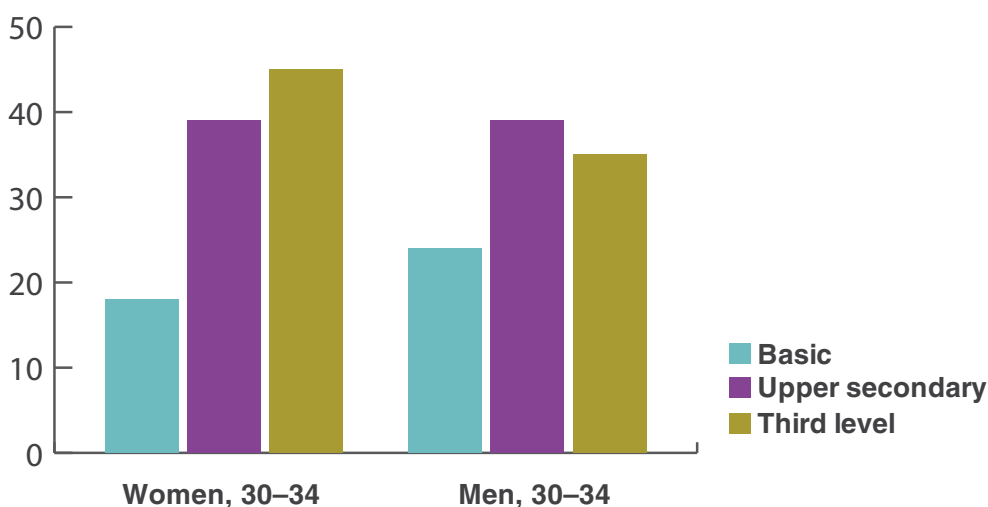
(Green *et al.*, 2008). There is, however, an important qualification to this research, which is that in both the US and the UK a large part of the population is migrant and therefore was not educated within that system. Although it does not necessarily tell us something about the long-term impact of the system.

### Irish Data

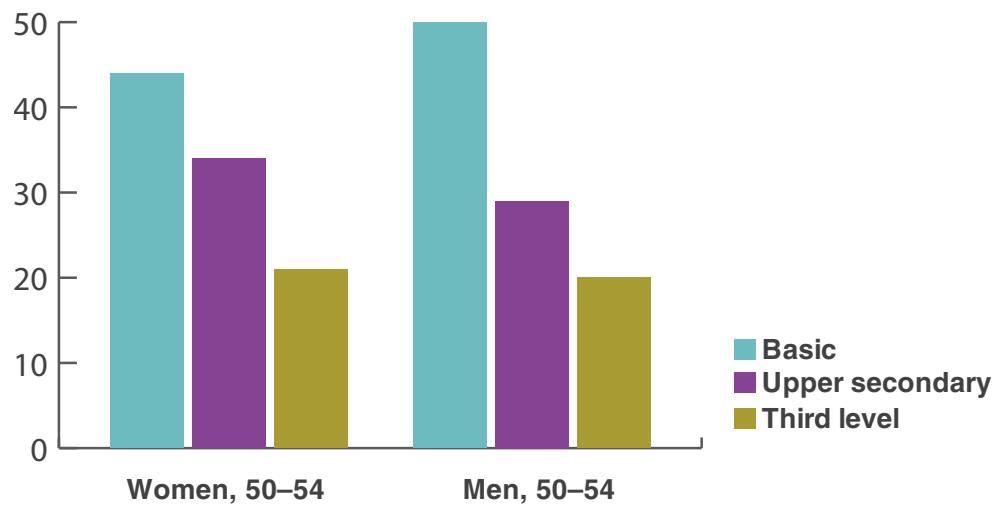
There is a scarcity of research in this area in Ireland and unfortunately Ireland did not participate in the most recent European Adult Education Survey. Nonetheless, some interesting evidence on the level of skills in the population comes from the International Adult Literacy Survey taken in 1995/6, which, although very dated, is consistent with more recent data.

The educational level of adults in Ireland in 2005 shows that people in their early thirties are relatively highly qualified (see Figure 1). As we move to older adults in Ireland, there is a very marked inequality by age, which may be stronger than it is in other societies. This might be so for historical reasons because the Irish education system developed very rapidly in the period between the 1960s and the 1980s. There was very significant investment, particularly in the regional technical colleges and the secondary level of education, which had a very real impact on the life-chances of younger Irish people. But the data for those aged fifty to fifty-four reveal a real generational impact (see Figure 2). There is a very steep downward curve from those who only have the most basic level of education through to those educated to third level, which is a very clear minority of the population among people in their early fifties. Figures for those in their early seventies show that third-level education among older generations is almost invisible in Ireland. There is a very marked age-related inequality and also gender-related inequality. These data come from the Labour Force Survey, which covers those in the labour market – not necessarily those who are in employment – and is therefore only a sample of women and men.

**Figure 1: Educational Levels of Irish Adults Aged 30 to 34, 2005**



**Figure 2: Educational Levels of Irish Adults Aged 50 to 54, 2005**



The evidence on who gets what kind of training in Ireland is very patchy. The Labour Force Survey reveals quite clear inequalities around who accesses work-based training rather than training in a college or a university. This is strongly linked to prior educational levels. Among the workforce, those with basic schooling have relatively few opportunities and only around 10 per cent of them are likely to participate in work-based training. Those who have third-level education are far more likely to get education and training in the workplace. The so-called Matthew principle – those who have more, get more – operates within lifelong learning as well as within other areas of life.

What is happening in Ireland is certainly consistent with the analysis that has been undertaken of the International Adult Learning Survey data, and for Ireland there are still persistent inequalities. Inequality by age is more marked in Ireland than in most Western European societies (where inequalities due to prior education are more common). There are also marked inequalities by socio-economic status and particularly by labour market position. It is very clear that in Ireland, as elsewhere, one of the major determinants of whether you get training is whether you have a job and if so what kind of job you have. If you work in the public sector or for a large company you are much more likely to get training, including high quality training, than if you work for a small firm, a micro-enterprise, a family enterprise and so on.

In terms of early school leaving and income inequality relative to other Western European countries, Ireland is more or less where you would expect it to be. There is a clear correlation between early school leaving and income inequality. The outlier with 40 per cent participation but slightly higher income inequality than Ireland is the UK. There does appear to be a loose correlation between participation in continuing training and a much closer correlation between school leaving and relative levels of inequality. The relative levels of inequality in Ireland are more or less about the Western European medium. This may be surprising, given the relatively low income tax in Ireland and the relatively high consumer taxes, which tend to be associated with high inequalities.

We also have the impact of the recession. There is a myth in Ireland, as elsewhere, that we have for the first time a major recession that is impacting on the middle classes. However, the available data suggests that the short-term

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impact of the recession in Ireland and elsewhere in Western Europe is primarily on precisely those groups who have suffered very seriously in past recessions, and in particular on young new entrants to the labour market and the least well-qualified educationally.

### **Equality Through Lifelong Learning**

Lifelong learning may well be reproducing some inequalities that are deeply entrenched. In this regard, income inequality appears to be a factor in educational inequality at the macro level; whether it is also a factor at the level of the individual or the community is much harder to establish. Lifelong learning clearly impacts on people's lives and has a potential role in overcoming inequalities, however, we should also recognise that highly unequal participation in education sharpens inequalities. Promoting equality in practical terms means that we should use intelligently the evidence that we have that adult learning makes a difference.

We tend to think that the brain is pretty much fixed in shape, size and function by the time a person has gone through adolescence. We all know the brain during adolescence is in turbulence, which is why teenagers make poor decisions, but actually the brain continues to change and develop throughout life. So, there is accumulating evidence, both neurological and sociological – and indeed economic, that adult learning makes a difference to people's life-chances, it makes a difference to their lives (Cooper *et al.*, 2010).

We need to test policies, therefore, against their impact on vulnerable groups. We need to think about the balance of specific opportunities for particular groups and whether there are particular groups in our society, such as Travellers, that require specific, highly targeted learning opportunities. Such groups need access to both existing opportunities and targeted and specific initiatives. We need to be thinking about a number of clear priorities on the basis of evidence showing that language, literacy and numeracy skills make specific differences for specific groups and that literacy initiatives have an impact on people's life-chances.

Finally, we have to face up to the challenges of migration and demographic change, including inequality by age. There is a real challenge and a real problem in age-related inequalities, with particular generations having had very little access to educational opportunities in the past and still receiving very little current investment. The risk is that the recession will intensify these inequalities because governments tend to focus on the risk of producing a scarred generation, a new lost generation. The risk of a lost generation is an important one and one that we need to think about, although not necessarily at the expense of cutting opportunities for older groups, in particular for older adults in the context of the demographic change that we are undergoing.

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# **Inequality and Discrimination in the Irish Labour Market**

**Dr. Helen Russell**

*Economic and Social Research Institute*

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## Introduction

This paper draws on the results of the research programme on equality and discrimination that researchers at the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) have been carrying out, with the Equality Authority, since 2005. The programme investigates all nine grounds covered by the Irish equality legislation and the research addresses inequality and discrimination both in the labour market and in access to services. Today I am focusing on the labour market and within that domain I am concentrating on the experiences of non-Irish nationals.

The different studies in the research programme examine three different sources of evidence relating to discrimination and inequality:

1. Self-report data, that is surveys of people's own experience of discrimination.
2. 'Unequal outcomes', that is comparing a range of different outcomes such as pay, participation rates and occupation across the groups of interest (for example men and women, Irish nationals and non-Irish nationals). The method involves investigating what part of the difference can be attributed to other differences between the groups such as qualification levels and what part cannot be explained in this way and may therefore involve discrimination.
3. A field experiment that tries to directly test employers' behaviour toward national and non-Irish national job seekers.

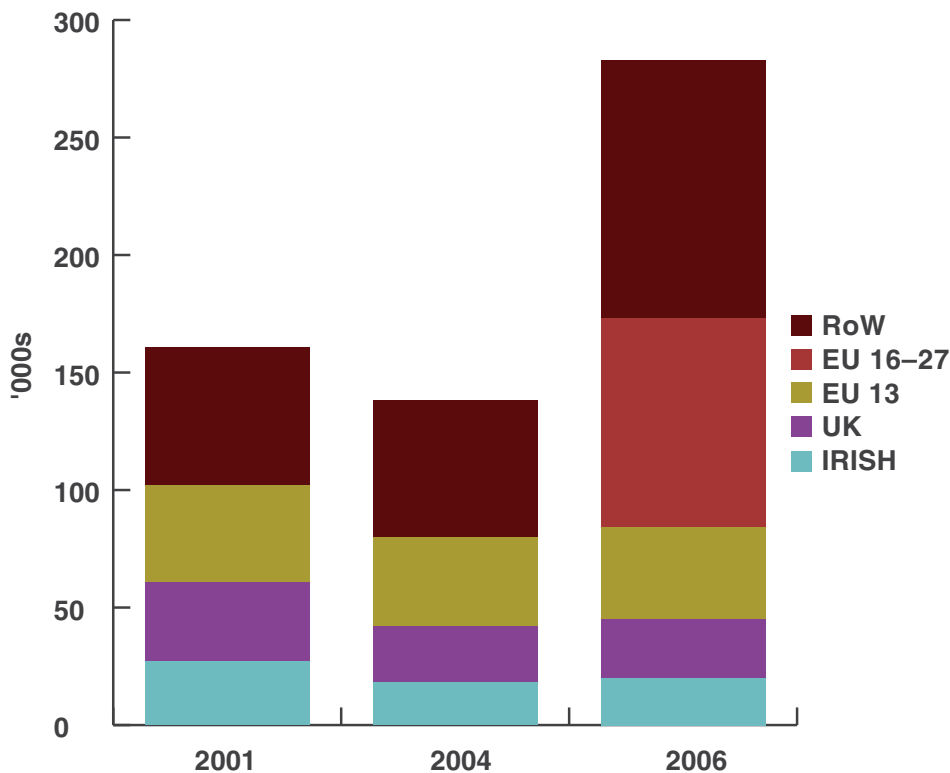
These three sources provide complementary evidence on the topic of inequality and discrimination in the Irish labour market and the combined results give us a stronger sense of the processes involved than could be provided by each of the methodologies alone.

## Labour Market Context

The Irish labour market has become much more diverse over the last fifteen years, especially during the period of the Celtic Tiger. There was a very dramatic increase in female participation. Between 1996 and 2006 almost 300,000 women joined the Irish labour force. There was also a substantial increase in the number of non-Irish nationals as well as some change in the age profile of the labour force. So, the economic boom was very important in drawing in groups that had been previously excluded, but the flipside of that is that the current recession and contraction of employment creates new risks around inequality and discrimination that we should recognise.

To give you a sense of the diversity in terms of nationality, Figure 1 shows the immigration flows from 2001 to 2007. The flows are the number of people entering Ireland each year, rather than the stock that is the cumulative number. So, you can see that there was quite a rapid increase. In 2001 there were just under 60,000 immigrants and then this rose to over 110,000 in 2007. Some of the immigrants are returning Irish migrants. The driving force of the change over the period is the number of migrants (53,000) from the new European Union member states (the ten member states that acceded to the EU in 2004).

Figure 1: Estimated Immigration Flows by Nationality, 2001, 2004 and 2006



Source: O'Connell and McGinnity (2008), p. 5.

The first study that I draw on to examine the experiences of non-Irish nationals in the labour market is *The Experience of Discrimination in Ireland* (Russell *et al.*, 2008) and this study is based on people's own perceptions of discrimination.

It draws on a special module in the Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) carried out by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) in 2004, which looked at people's experience of discrimination as they saw it themselves. It was a very large survey, consisting of 24,000 people, and is a representative sample of the population. However, it does underestimate the number of non-Irish nationals. There are a number of reasons why migrants may be less likely to participate in a survey, for example:

- The survey was only conducted in English and therefore those with English language difficulties are likely to be excluded.
- Immigrants may have greater concerns about the use of the information they provide in a survey; this is particularly problematic for people who are illegal immigrants or perhaps who are working in the informal economy.

The CSO has estimated that non-Irish nationals are under-represented in the QNHS by about 15 to 20 per cent when compared with the Census figures.

The survey asked people directly whether they felt that they were discriminated against over the last two years in nine different situations – seven of these situations related to accessing services such as financial services, pubs,

restaurants and housing. Two of the situations related to the labour force and that is what I am focusing on here. Respondents were asked had they experienced discrimination 'while at work' or 'while looking for work.'

The data reflect what respondents themselves perceive as discrimination, and the experience they have in mind would not necessarily meet a legal definition of what constitutes discrimination. However, respondents were given a definition of discrimination, based on the Irish equality legislation, to guide their responses (see Box 1).

### **Box 1: Definition of Discrimination on Equality Module (Prompt Card)**

Discrimination takes place when one person or a group of persons are treated less favourably than others because of their gender, marital status, family status, age, disability, 'race' – skin colour or ethnic group, sexual orientation, religious belief, and/or membership of the Traveller community.

Discrimination can occur in situations such as where a person or persons is/are refused access to a service, to a job, or is/are treated less favourably at work. In other words, discrimination means treating people differently, negatively or adversely because they are for instance Asian, Muslim, over fifty years of age, a single parent, and/or homosexual.

If the reason you may have been treated less favourably than someone else is due to another reason (such as your qualifications, being over an income limit or because you are further back in a queue for something) this does not constitute discrimination.

As responses are subjective, the true level of discrimination may be underestimated because people may have been discriminated against and they do not know it or they may not have recognised their treatment as discrimination. For example, a job applicant who gets no response from an employer has no way of knowing whether he or she was excluded on the basis of gender or family status or nationality or qualifications.

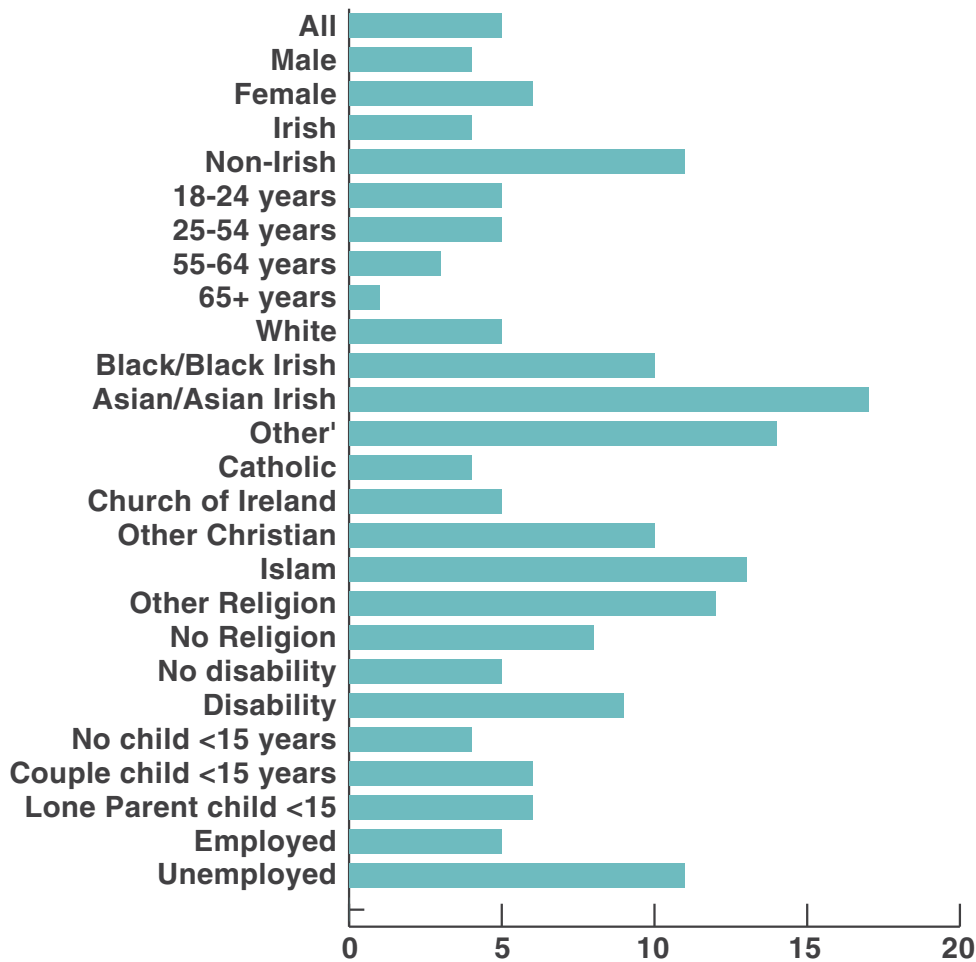
Discrimination may also be overestimated by self-reports. People in some cases may think that they were discriminated against because of their gender or their age but, in fact, their treatment was due to, for example, poor performance or differences in qualifications.

Overall the proportion of respondents saying that they had experienced some type of discrimination in the previous two years was 12.5 per cent. Seven per cent of respondents experienced work-related discrimination: 6 per cent experienced discrimination looking for work and 5 per cent said they had experienced discrimination in work. The figures exclude those for whom the question was not applicable. For example, if somebody was not in work for the past two years they are most likely to say that that question does not apply to them, so they were excluded from the figures.

Figure 2 shows the percentages saying that they had experienced discrimination at work across a range of groups. Among non-Irish nationals, 11 per cent said they had experienced discrimination at work (compared with 4 per cent of Irish nationals). There are also strong differences across other groups. For example, those who identified themselves as 'Black/Black Irish'

or 'Asian/Asian Irish' on the ethnicity question have a much higher rate of discrimination than those defining themselves as 'White'. The unemployed also report a high level of discrimination, although they are not covered by equality legislation.

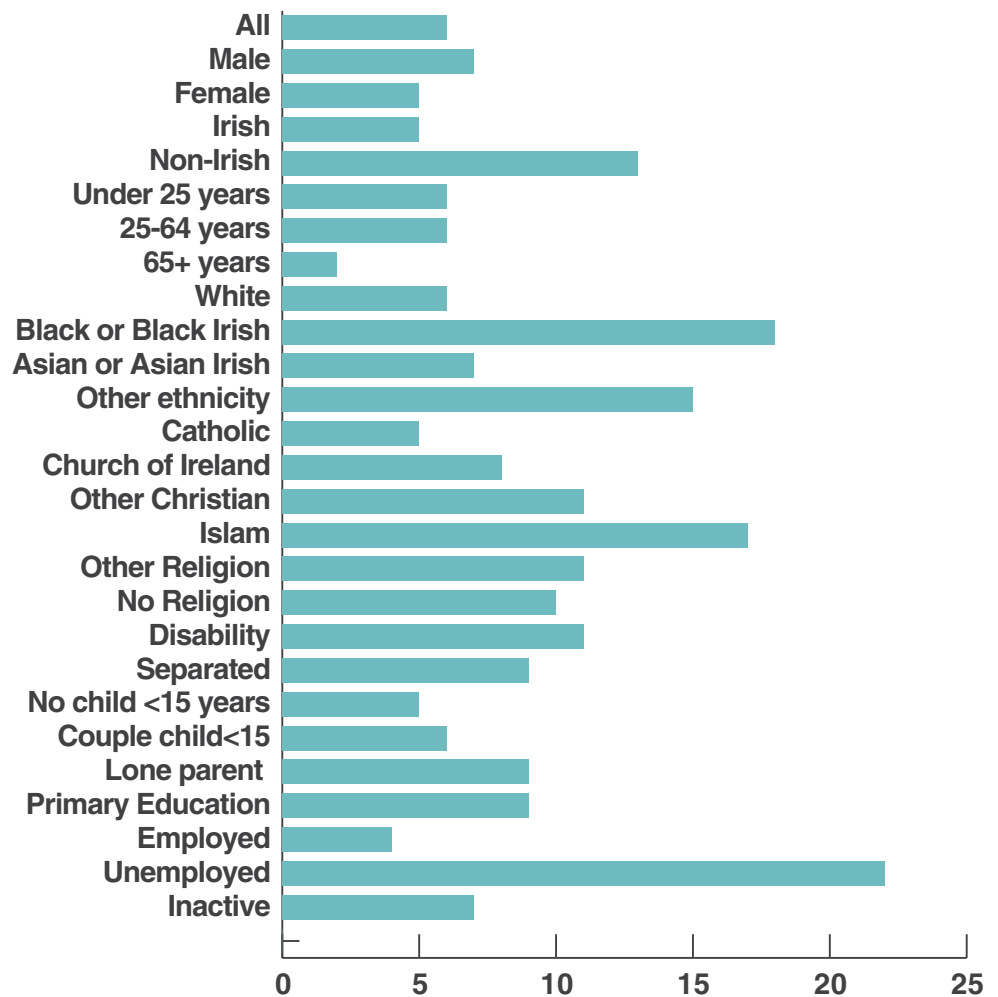
**Figure 2: Discrimination in Last Two Years 'at Work'**



Source: QNHS, Equality Module, (2004).

Figure 3 presents the rates of discrimination during job searches as reported by different groups. For the non-Irish national group, we see 13 per cent are experiencing discrimination or felt that they had been discriminated against while they were looking for work. Again, those in minority ethnic or religious groups, the unemployed and people with disabilities emerge as having particularly high rates of discrimination. In the report we discuss all the risk factors associated with self-reported discrimination.

**Figure 3: Experience of Discrimination While Looking for Work\***



\* The figures refer to a sub-section of the whole population who have been engaged in job searches over the last two years and excludes those who answered 'not applicable'.

The next step in the analysis was to see if these differences remain when we compare 'like with like', that is when we compare people of the same age with the same level of education etc. and then check whether nationality is still associated with differences within these selected groups. This analysis is done with regression models and Table 1 highlights the results and shows the independent effect of nationality controlling for a range of other factors, including duration and work characteristics such as occupation and industry. The model results show that the non-Irish person is one and a half times more likely to experience discrimination in work and two and a half times more likely to experience subjective discrimination while looking for work than a non-Irish person with the same measured characteristics. The ethnicity variable does not have a separate independent influence but that is mainly because in Ireland most of ethnic minority respondents also fall into the non-Irish nationality group. So there is quite a big overlap between those categories.

**Table 1: Modelled Risk of Self-Reported Discrimination in the Labour Market**

	At work	Looking for work	Any work-related
Male	Reference	Reference	Reference
Female	+	-	+
Irish	Reference	Reference	Reference
<b>Non-Irish</b>	<b>+ (1.49)</b>	<b>++ (2.53)</b>	<b>+ (1.63)</b>
White	Reference	Reference	Reference
Black or Black Irish	Same	Same	Same
Asian or Asian Irish	Same	Same	Same
Other	Same	Same	+
No disability	Reference	Reference	Reference
Disability	+ + (2.76)	+ (1.86)	+ + (2.29)
Single	Reference	Reference	Reference
Married	-	-	-
Separated	+	Same	+
No child <15 yrs	Reference	Reference	Reference
Couple child<15 yrs	+	Same	+
Lone parent	Same	Same	Same
Employed	Reference	Reference	Reference
Unemployed	+ + (3.14)	+ + (8.71)	+
Inactive	Same	+ + (2.96)	Same

**Note: For full model results see Russell et al. (2008).**

The study also considered the impact of discrimination and whether people take action in response to it. It is interesting to look at the experience of non-Irish respondents in this respect. In general we found that those who experience more discrimination are less likely to have taken any action as a result. Overall the majority (60 per cent) of those experiencing did not take any further action and this rose to 73 per cent amongst the non-Irish population. Further analysis showed that this was partly to do with the lack of knowledge of rights; the non-Irish respondents were much more likely than Irish nationals to say that they had a low knowledge of their rights.

### **Comparison of Labour Market Outcomes of Irish and Non-Irish Nationals**

I now move to the next piece of evidence in the picture, to a study that uses objective measures rather than subjective measures and examines the actual difference in labour market outcomes for different groups. This work has been carried out by Philip O'Connell and Frances McGinnity at the ESRI and also forms part of the ESRI/Equality Authority research programme. The study uses the same dataset as discussed above, the QNHS, so there is the same issue about the under-representation of non-Irish nationals in the sample. This may give rise to the underestimation of labour market disadvantage because it may be those who have greater language difficulties and those working illegally who experience greater labour market disadvantage. Therefore it is likely that the results represent a lower band estimate of the disadvantage experienced by non-Irish nationals.

First we compare the raw unemployment rates and employment rates for Irish and non-Irish nationals. In 2004 non-Irish nationals had a 7 per cent rate of unemployment, compared with 4.5 per cent for Irish nationals.

However, non-Irish nationals differ from the Irish population in a number of relevant ways. We know, for example, that non-Irish nationals in Ireland tend to have higher levels of education than the average for the Irish population. The non-Irish national group also differ from the national population in terms of their age profile, as it is younger adults who are most likely to migrate. We need to take these factors into account when we assess how migrants are doing in the labour market. The study found that controlling for education and age, non-Irish nationals were still twice as likely to be unemployed.

Other potentially relevant factors were not included in the dataset, such as the length of time respondents have been resident in Ireland, but that might also contribute to explaining the difference in unemployment rates.

**Table 2: Logistic Regression of Unemployment (ILO basis)**

	Odds	Sig.
Female	0.87	.110
Age	0.97	.000
Higher Secondary	0.46	.000
Post-Secondary	0.31	.000
Non-Irish National	2.15	.000
Constant	0.36	.000
N of Cases	12,885	
Nakelkerke R-squared	0.05	

The authors also apply the same strategy to examining differences in occupational position. Table 3 shows that non-Irish nationals are under-represented in managerial jobs and are over-represented in lower level jobs. O’Connell and McGinnity find that, controlling for education, age and sex, non-Irish nationals are 22 per cent less likely to be in professional or managerial occupations than Irish nationals.

**Table 3: Occupational Position Among Irish and Non-Irish Respondents, 2004**

	Irish	Non-Irish
	%	%
Managers and administrators	17.3	9.2
Professionals	12.7	12.4
Associate professional and technical	10.0	9.1
Clerical and secretarial	12.8	8.1
Craft and related	11.7	14.9
Personal and protective service	10.4	16.1
Sales	7.7	9.9
Plant and machine operatives	8.6	7.5
Other (includes not stated)	8.7	12.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
N of Cases	12,750	1,078

**Source: O’Connell and McGinnity (2008), p. 25.**

As the survey did not collect information on respondents’ own level of confidence in English or an assessment of language competency by the interviewer, country of origin was used as a proxy for English-language ability. The analyses showed that there was indeed an additional penalty for migrants

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from non-English-speaking countries. The study also found an additional negative effect on both the occupational attainment and the unemployment risk for members of minority ethnic groups.

As mentioned earlier, with this type of analysis there is always the possibility that the differences could still be due to characteristics that have not been measured in the survey. Labour market disparities may be due to differences in 'location specific human capital', such as familiarity with local employment conditions and networks, and transferability of qualifications and skills.

Other research carried out by colleagues at the ESRI (Barrett and Duffy, 2008) looked at the pay penalty for migrants. They found that on average non-Irish nationals earn 19 per cent less than Irish nationals, holding their education level and other factors constant. That research also found that occupational disadvantage did not improve with length of residence, at least within a timeframe of five to ten years.

### **Experimental Evidence of Labour Market Discrimination Against Non-Irish Nationals**

The final piece of complementary evidence of discrimination within the research programme comes from an experimental study that was carried out by Frances McGinnity, Pete Lunn, Emma Quinn and Jacqueline Nelson in the ESRI (McGinnity *et al.*, 2009). The advantage of this approach is that it directly measures discrimination by testing employer's behaviour. The previous types of evidence discussed are indirect, making it more difficult to refute the claim, for example, that the differences in outcomes observed are not due to discrimination but to some other characteristic that one has not measured in the research, or, with the evidence from self-reports, the claim that respondents are over-reporting discrimination. The experimental method allows us a more direct way of getting at discrimination. As far as we know this is the first study of its kind to be carried out in Ireland.

The methodology of the field experiment is described in detail in the report, but the key features are set out in Box 2. Two matched CVs were sent to employers in response to job openings that were advertised in the press and on the Internet. The CVs were matched in all factors relevant to the job such as qualifications, job experience and age. The key difference was the name. One would have an Irish name, and the other CV would have a German name, an Asian name or an African name. The names were pre-tested to see that people immediately identified them with a different nationality.

The CVs were not absolutely identical because that would increase the likelihood that the experiment would be detected. Instead the CVs were made equivalent, that is both candidates would have the same level of qualifications and the same length and type of job experience. Then the CVs were rotated – so for one job, one particular CV was given the Irish name and then the next time around that CV was given a non-Irish name. This allows the researcher to control for any perceived differences in the equivalised CVs.

Very importantly, all the qualifications and work experience were gained in Ireland. So, all applicants were given Irish qualifications such as the Leaving Certificate and Irish third-level qualifications where relevant. Therefore differential treatment could not be attributed to that factor.



The method requires selecting occupations that use formal recruitment procedures. With this requirement in mind, three occupations were chosen for the experiment: lower administration, lower accountancy and retail sales. The experiment was carried out between March 2008 and October 2008. Unfortunately, this was just as the employment situation began to deteriorate and therefore it took somewhat longer to achieve the required number of advertised vacancies than expected. In total, 240 paired CVs were sent to employers.

**Box 2: Key Features of the Experimental Method**

<b>Sent two matched CVs with different names</b>
Equivalent not identical CVs (rotated)
Names chosen from registers and web searches, then pre-tested, for example Patrick Byrne, Albrecht Schroder, Babatunde Okon, Mohinder Singh
Three occupations: lower administration, lower accountancy, retail sales
Experiment conducted from March 2008 to October 2008
<b>Logistical issues</b>
Fictitious employers, degree courses, addresses
All qualifications Irish, candidates young
Online and newspaper advertisements in the Dublin area
<b>Project approved by ethics committee</b>
No identifying information published, now destroyed
Inconvenience minimised
Outweighed by harm of discrimination

Of the 240 pairs of CVs, in 147 cases both applicants were rejected or there was no response received by either candidate. In 23 cases, both candidates were invited for interview. In 55 cases, only the Irish candidate was invited to interview; in 15 cases, only the applicant with the minority name was invited.

In the literature, there are a number of ways of calculating the level of discrimination in such experiments. The first method is to calculate the ‘net discrimination’, which is the ‘Irish only’ figures minus the ‘minority only’ figures (55–15=40), and then determine the ‘discrimination rate’ by dividing that figure by the total number of candidates who were invited to interview (23+55+15=93). This leads to an overall discrimination rate of 43 per cent (see Table 4). However, there is some debate in the literature about what the denominator should be for this calculation.

The authors’ preferred methodology is to use the odds ratio (second last row of Table 4). This calculates the odds of a person with an Irish name being invited to interview versus the odds of a person with a non-Irish name being invited to interview. Overall the candidate with the Irish name is more than twice as likely to be invited to interview than the candidate with the non-Irish name and this result is highly statistically significant.

**Table 4: Results of Recruitment Experiment**

	Irish/African	Irish/Asian	Irish/German	Total
Both rejected	54	46	47	147
Both invited	4	8	11	23
Irish only	18	19	18	55
Minority only	5	7	3	15
Net discrimination	13	12	15	40
Discrimination rate	48%	35%	47%	43%
Odds ratio	2.44	1.80	2.07	2.05
P-value	0.005	0.014	0.001	0.000001

The difference between the non-Irish and Irish names was significant in each of the nationalities considered. In other studies in the UK and elsewhere, differences have been found across minorities, so that some groups experience higher discrimination than others but the Irish study found that the German name was just as likely to be discriminated against as the African or Asian name. The differences between the non-Irish groups were not statistically significant. Compared with other international studies of this type, the Irish result is quite high but it is not completely unprecedented in the literature. Generally the ratios are about 1.5, whereas Ireland's ratio is over 2. These results provide another important piece of direct evidence of discrimination of non-Irish nationals in the Irish labour market and reinforce the results found in the other two studies presented here.

## Conclusions

The three different sources of evidence show that inequality and indeed discrimination are still a matter of concern in the Irish labour market. By applying a range of different methodologies the research programme has enhanced the validity and credibility of those results. Overall the self-reports found that about 7 per cent of people in the labour market have experienced discrimination over the last few years. The rate of self-reported discrimination was particularly high not just among non-Irish nationals as considered in this paper, but also among people with disabilities and the unemployed. The combined results of the study suggest that there is a need for policy intervention to reduce discrimination and promote equality

Issues highlighted in the report include the need for greater information for both employees and employers, such as information on, for example, what exactly is permitted and not permitted under the legislation. Lack of knowledge was a factor in the failure of non-Irish national and other groups to take any further action in response to perceived discrimination, which indicates that employees need such information too. At a practical level, guidelines about best practice in terms of recruitment would also be useful for employers. The research also raised the possibility of random audits of hiring practices, which – a bit like a financial audit – would require employers to keep records of their recruitment processes for, say, twelve months. As part of a random audit employers would have to justify their procedures for shortlisting and candidate selection.

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The work of Qualifications Recognition Ireland<sup>1</sup> is also very important in reducing labour market disadvantage among non-Irish nationals. Many non-Irish nationals are being employed below their educational level and recognition is a very important piece of the picture in terms of allowing migrants to transfer those skills and qualifications gained outside Ireland. The research on outcomes, which shows that the people from non-English-speaking countries were doing worse in the labour market, suggests that there is a need for language training supports. As these are not being provided by employers, there is a need for the State to provide such training.

It is also important in the current economic climate to sound a warning note that during a recession there are potentially greater risks of discrimination. If there are a very high number of applicants for jobs then there is a greater opportunity for employers to pick and choose and to discriminate against minority groups (whether this is based on in-group preferences, negative stereotypes or statistical discrimination). Also in a recession, increased job insecurity means that employees are much less likely to make a complaint regarding discrimination. Therefore it is important to reiterate that the equality agenda – i.e. freedom from discrimination – is a right protected by law; it is not a luxury we can only afford to have during the good times.

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<sup>1</sup> The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, established in 1999, set up the Qualifications Recognition Ireland (QRI) service to provide advice on international qualifications and their equivalence to Irish qualifications. ORI's work is intended to facilitate improved matching of qualifications and skills to jobs in the Irish labour market.

# **Bringing Equality to the Centre: Mainstreaming Equality and the VEC Sector**

**Fiona Hartley**

*County Wicklow VEC*

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## **Introduction**

County Wicklow VEC, City of Waterford VEC and County Dublin VEC are fortunate to have received an equality mainstreaming support package from the Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA) and the Equality Mainstreaming Unit of the Equality Authority. The purpose of the package is to support Co. Wicklow VEC to embed an equality mainstreaming ethos throughout our organisation with a particular focus on adult and further education.

Recognising the value of equality is not new to the VEC sector. Access and social inclusion are central values of the VEC sector in adult, further and second-level education. The enrolment policies of the VEC sector, for example, have led the way in combating educational disadvantage. The sector also leads the way in school completion initiatives and in combating early school leaving. We are actively engaged in community education and work in partnership with community development groups and area-based partnerships. This role and our achievements to date need to be acknowledged. Professor Field mentioned the importance of family learning as one of the factors that makes a difference in addressing educational disadvantage. I would like to remind you that the VEC sector, through the continuum of lifelong education services offered, actively addresses intergenerational educational disadvantage.

I would also like to acknowledge the importance of the equality impact assessment guidelines, which were drawn up a number of years ago by the IVEA and the Equality Authority. Equally the Further Education Support Service (FESS) offers tremendous support in the area of equality resources for tutors, practitioners and learners.

## **The VEC Sector**

The VEC sector comprises an extensive range of educational services and supports. The sector has led the way in adult and further education; for example our post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses for eighteen-year-olds and increasingly for older students and the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) have achieved immense outcomes over the past twenty years. As a sector we have provided leadership in offering dynamic responses to labour market needs and to the long-term unemployed. The Youthreach programme for early school leavers ensures that the outcomes for these students are greatly improved. Professor Field referenced the importance of re-engaging these young people in the education system. The Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) offers a flexible, modular response to adults who left school early, with genuine progression and certification options.

The VEC sector does not just run the programmes funded through the Department of Education and Science (DES). Although the sector is the main provider of DES programmes, VECs also work in partnership with other state agencies and local development companies. The sector is currently engaged in a very interesting initiative with FÁS and a national framework agreement has recently been finalised to enhance greater co-operation as a response to the current recessionary difficulties. This agreement will also ensure that we are targeting our resources in the most appropriate way.

Only last week I was involved in a discussion about risk management and corporate governance. Our insurers recently published a document about

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ensuring best practice in corporate governance in the area of risk management and the strong emphasis on equality was noticeable. This emphasis appeared not only in terms of employment legislation but also in terms of equality-proofed opportunities for learners.

### **The Equality Agenda in County Wicklow VEC**

I am here today as the CEO of County Wicklow VEC to speak to you about our equality mainstreaming project, which is very much a team process. The team is led by me as CEO and includes Angela Higgins, Education Development Officer, and Catherine Byrne, Adult Education Officer. We have also been very fortunate to have the services of Siobhan Cluskey, who was our Equality and Disability Projects Officer for a one-year project.

As an organisation, County Wicklow VEC had already made considerable progress in meeting the legislative requirement in terms of equality, particularly around our employees. The challenge of actively creating an equality culture for those who are using our services, however, had eluded us. Our services impact significantly on our learners and we would like to think that this impact has a cascading effect into the communities in which they live.

Each VEC was expected to produce a five-year education plan in 2005/2006. A priority goal in our plan was equality; this was also reflected in many other VECs' plans. A number of the objectives and actions related to equality but there were also three specific goals around embedding values, equality and respect throughout the organisation:

1. The development of an equality action plan and an organisation-wide equality and diversity training strategy.
2. The development of services and programmes that meet the diverse educational needs of learners and restate our commitment to inclusion for all.
3. Encouraging an ethos of lifelong learning to ensure accessibility and progression for our learners.

Through our education plan, therefore, we sought to ensure a cohesive organisational approach to equality.

Equality is part of our value system; it emanates not only from our Senior Management Team but also from our Adult and Education Forum (AFEF). The AFEF is coordinated and facilitated by our Adult Education Officer and comprises all the programme managers and coordinators within our adult and further education services. The AFEF meets, reviews the education plan, decides on the priorities and, through a variety of different implementation teams, implements the plan. We have one specific implementation team on equality mainstreaming, which includes representatives from across the service strands.

County Wicklow VEC caters for urban populations, for example in Bray, which is part of the urban shadow and spillover of the greater Dublin area; as well as isolated communities in, for example, rural areas of west Wicklow. The challenge for us is to develop programmes that meet the needs of people,

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not only in the high density urban areas, where the disadvantage is quite concentrated, but also in terms of rural disadvantage. It is easier in a way to put on a programme in Bray than it is to do something meaningful for a small community in Hollywood or Vallemount on the top of the Wicklow Gap.

County Wicklow VEC has 1,400 employees. We manage eleven second-level schools, including five schools that are part of the DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) programme, and we work very closely with our partners in the national school sector. We have seven adult and further education centres, based in the main towns: Bray, Arklow, Wicklow, Blessington and Carnew. We have one outdoor education centre and one Senior Traveller Training Centre. We offer PLC and VTOS courses. We are also responsible for the Bray Institute of Further Education (BIFE), which this year had an enrolment of over 1,000 PLC students.

We are strongly aware of the importance and strength of our relationships with the local and community development sectors and with FÁS and other partners. Recently we have been significantly developing our work in youth services, linking in with, for example, the Young People's Facilities and Services Fund and the Local Drugs Task Force initiatives. Everything that we do is permeated by the theme of addressing disadvantage and ensuring equality.

VECs are required, through FETAC (Further Education and Training Awards Council) quality assurance, to comply with equality legislation. Sometimes there can be a danger of minimising this compliance; however, in practice it is an important tool for equality training and equality planning. Again, I would like to commend the Further Education Support Services, which recently launched an equality action planning framework that is a very practical support.

To initiate the process of equality mainstreaming, we set up cross-organisational seminars for all principals, deputies, senior post-holders within schools and staff in adult and further education. We brought them together in a series of workshops facilitated by Dr. Phyllis Murphy of the School of Social Justice at University College Dublin. These seminars really got us thinking about what was required and how it should be approached in a practical and transferable manner.

We appointed an Equality and Disability Projects Officer, a position which was unfortunately for only one year as the funding came to an end. We felt quite secure in having this post because we knew we had a specialist to give us guidance. Then we found ourselves without the specialist, and with the challenge of maintaining our commitment to the equality agenda. We were fortunate in that the invitation came from the IVEA and the Equality Mainstreaming Unit to make an application for funding, which was successful and for which we are very grateful.

We knew that we were not going to get additional resources or new types of programmes or service programmes, so we decided to reassess the competence of all our managers in adult and further education. We started discussing with them how we might develop their roles beyond the traditional boundaries and in doing this we found new expertise, including staff who have a background in women's studies, equality studies, gender studies and, of course, education and training.

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We would like to embed an equality focus in the day-to-day planning and delivery of our education services. The actual 'how' or the nitty-gritty is the greater challenge. The first part is the development by the implementation team of guidelines on equality mainstreaming in adult and further education in County Wicklow VEC. We started by looking at definitions and examining programmes, not just so that we would comply with FETAC quality assurance but to evaluate all aspects of what we do. The process is about recognising the impact that we can have on learners, staff, the organisation and the wider community. We are going to produce guidelines on planning in terms of reasonable accommodation, location, timing, the application process, course design, contents, materials and resources that reflect diversity. We are going to put particular emphasis on how we integrate literacy across our range of programmes, as well as looking at the resources that we use, whether visual, aural or written.

As part of this process, we need to be conscious of the organisational challenge in supporting staff. One of the most challenging areas is the course delivery and methodology and what values the tutors bring to this. We will outline some steps to implement an equality mainstreaming perspective through the development, delivery, review and evaluation cycle. As I mentioned before, the implementation team includes managers who have a track record and expertise not only in the service area that they manage but also in further studies that go beyond their traditional role. The implementation will be continuously underpinned by our organisational structures, which we have spent a lot of time embedding. There will be a monitoring of the implementation process as well as an exchange of ideas and mutual support.

### **Outcomes**

This project will hopefully achieve improved progression and a further mainstreaming of equality into our second-level services. We will develop resources for sharing across the adult and further education sector, not only within the VEC sector but also with other providers of further education and training. We hope that there will be a removal of barriers, improved access and a supportive learning environment for our learners. Finally, we hope to enrich County Wicklow VEC through an authentic commitment to our promotion of equality and social inclusion. I think it is only in this way that we can actually ensure that we have a concrete and measurable impact on equality for our learners.





# The Great ESCape: A Light in the Education Tunnel

**Eddie Higgins**  
*EQUAL Ireland*

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## **Introduction**

I am a trade union official and a representative of EQUAL Ireland. I am also here to represent IBEC (Irish Business and Employers Confederation) and I work for SIPTU (Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union).

EQUAL Ireland was founded about nine years ago by Turlough O’Sullivan of IBEC, Des Geraghty of SIPTU, Rody Molloy of FÁS and Nuala Keher of Lionra. They were all at the head of their organisations at the time, which allowed us to get the organisations onboard for downstream mainstreaming. From the very outset we recognised the importance of having access to the people at the top of the organisations.

We started off with IBEC, SIPTU, FÁS and Lionra and expanded to include the Adult Learners’ Forum, which was established as part of the EQUAL Community Initiative – when the learners themselves, through democratic organisations, elected their own people to the EQUAL Ireland Network and the EQUAL Ireland Steering Group.

The group of local learning centres comprised these democratically elected community representatives, who also became directors of EQUAL Ireland. EQUAL Ireland therefore became an organisation that was representative of the social partners, the education providers, the community and the learners. This representation was very important from our point of view in terms of what we were attempting to do.

## **Re-Engaging People**

What were we attempting to do? We were not trying to get people into VECs, we were not trying to get people into universities, but we were trying to re-engage people with education as a way of ensuring their own self-development. We were fully aware that there are 500,000 people who have not yet finished second-level education and who are in real difficulty, even more so in a ‘knowledge’ economy.

The vehicle we chose, or rather it chose us, was one of our partners, Lionra. Lionra is a network of seven third-level colleges in the Border, Midlands and Western (BMW) region: Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology (GMIT), Institute of Technology (IT) Sligo, Athlone IT, Dundalk IT, Letterkenny IT, National University of Ireland Galway and St Angela’s College in Sligo.

We started out by doing some research. We asked 167 workplace representatives two questions: What were the obstacles from their point of view that their people had in coming back into education? If they came back in, what would they want to study? There were no surprises in the responses.

In terms of the obstacles, people did not go back into education because they did not have the time, the money and/or the motivation and self-confidence required. Taking this on board, we decided that we would attempt to design something that matched those needs regarding time, cost, confidence and motivation.

We commissioned research using two lecturers from GMIT and one from IT Sligo first to investigate what was available out there and how it related to

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what people wanted to learn and then to design the course. They actually designed three courses. We put the three courses out to almost 100 small and medium-sized enterprises in the BMW region and we asked those employers – manager-owners mostly – what they would think of somebody coming to them with one of the three skills sets.

We selected the type of skills set that was most attractive to employers and that also matched what the potential learners had chosen themselves. The result was the Essential Skills Certificate in Workplace, Community and Education. Why was it called the Essential Skills Certificate? It is because of the ESC (Escape) button on the top left-hand corner of a computer keyboard. This was appropriate because we felt that if we could get people onto this programme they would escape the situation they were in.

The skills set neatly fits with the European Union definition of what the essential skills are for the modern European workforce. The course was called 'Learning to Learn' and is a reintroduction to study for people who have been out of education and training for some years. IT skills were taught on the basis that a person coming into the course does not know what a mouse is. By the time they finish the programme, the learners will be able to use the Internet, Word, PowerPoint and Excel; the fundamentals that you need to be familiar with. The IT skills in the course are spread through the programme. There is also an element of Communications, with a really practical slant, which focuses on applying for a job, presenting yourself at an interview etc. The course also comprises of an Introduction to Enterprise and Development, an Introduction to Humanities, Maths for Science and Engineering, and something called Everyday Numbers. We argued on this topic long and hard from the trade union point of view, as we felt that having maths as part of the course might hamper the possibility to recruit people. We eventually agreed that maths had to be included, but decided that it was going to be taught in a completely different way from school maths, and it was.

I would like to mention a few things around time, cost, motivation and confidence. We condensed and reduced the content of the course and we got the programme down to one workshop per month that required physical attendance per topic. So six topics were condensed into six to nine workshops, over six to nine months maximum. The learners were brought from a level that was approximately that of Leaving Certificate into a minor award at Level 6 HETAC (Higher Education and Training Awards Council), which was externally examined by independent authorities who were amazed at the ability of these adults to commit themselves to this learning. The retention rate was very high. To sustain motivation, we did away with exams. Everything is done by continuous assessment – there is a lot of group work involved and this system supported the people themselves because they had been out of education for a while and therefore working in learning groups was really helpful.

On the recruitment side, what we did was to approach Irish Biscuits, which was closing down. I met the entire workforce in groups of twenty to twenty-five people. We recruited 148 people to the programme from a workforce of about 430, which was amazing as we normally only get about 10 per cent. One of the reasons why it was so attractive is because they were attending during working hours. Seventy people from that very same group graduated recently at a ceremony in the Mansion House, which was really great, we were delighted with it.

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We also approached Celtic Linen, a company in Wexford, and we invited the staff to a hotel directly across from the factory. They came over, listened to me talking and thirty-six of them signed up out of about sixty. It cost us less than a newspaper advertisement.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, I would like to say that the system works and it works very well. Evidence of this includes the fact that Leonardo, Transfer of Innovation, European Commission has funded us to deliver this programme in Turkey, Poland, Italy, Spain and Greece. All the materials will be translated into the local language and culture and the programme will be delivered to twenty-five people in each country. The International Labour Organization has agreed to endorse the programme. On top of that programme, we have now a Higher Certificate in Workplace and Community Studies and a BA in Business, Enterprise and Community Development.

# **Building Community-Based Access to Education: Millennium Partnership Fund**

**Siobhan O'Dowd**

*Pobal*

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## Introduction

I would like to talk about the Millennium Partnership Fund, the story of its journey and its current position in a time of change, much like Ireland itself. I envisage that what will come out of changes to the fund will enable it to be a much more community-based and community-focused fund. Community work, community development and community education have really underpinned the rolling out and development of the fund since its inception in 2001.

## Origins

In 2001 the then Minister for Education, Dr. Michael Woods, T.D. announced the establishment of the Action Group on Access to Third Level Education. At the same time he announced the start of the Millennium Partnership Fund as part of a coordinated framework to enable or to encourage the participation of disadvantaged students, students with disabilities and mature students into third-level education. The aim was to increase the participation of those people who were not part of the traditional 'mainstream' Leaving Certificate cohort of students.

The Millennium Partnership Fund was rolled out throughout the country through the former area partnership companies, now largely known as local development organisations. This action was an acknowledgement of the contributions of such organisations through existing interventions in the whole area of educational disadvantage and in working to increase participation at third level. Additionally, there is a broad operational policy context to the Millennium Partnership Fund: the fact that it is located within the structures of Pobal, which focuses on social inclusion, equality and reconciliation, really brings those areas to the forefront of the implementation of the fund.

The 2000 White Paper on Adult Education and Lifelong Learning presented an integrated and community-based concept to learning and education. The Action Group on Access to Third Level Education also recognised the value of the community sector and the potential of regional consortia to develop access programmes. More recently, the Action Plan for Educational Inclusion (DEIS) has highlighted a need for a multi-agency approach to tackle educational disadvantage at a local level. Looking at the National Anti-Poverty Strategy, the National Development Plan and *Towards 2016*, it is clear there that there have been repeated endorsements of community-based approaches and of their unrecognised or maybe underdeveloped potential.

If we move on to the practice context and how to build on local work, the Millennium Partnership Fund did not appear out of nowhere. It can be traced back to initiatives that were taken by area partnership companies, and, in particular, it can be linked to the Northside Partnership in Dublin, which operated a project called the Higher Education Support Scheme. This innovative scheme was seen as a model of best practice.

The decision to locate the fund within the partnership structure was also to do with supporting a mainstreaming role in terms of transferring best practice and good practice to a local level. Examples of this include the homework clubs, after-school supports and parents in education programmes. There was a feeling that the partnerships, due to their location, had a very good chance

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of targeting and increasing participation in further and higher education by students from disadvantaged areas.

The Millennium Partnership Fund was established by the Department of Education and Science with the aim of supporting students from the partnership and community partnership geographic areas with regard to their retention and participation in further and higher education. There was a real shift in terms of bringing the applications for the fund back from just the higher education sector into the further education sector and it still remains the only fund that is open to students in further education and mainstream funding. The message coming strongly from the partnership organisations was that access and progression have to be built on – it is a kind of continuum – they do not just happen upon being offered a place on a third-level course.

With regards to the eligible actions, there are mainly three types of actions in terms of student beneficiaries or people applying to the Millennium Partnership Fund. They involve financial support for studies, study supports and provision of information that is largely based around guidance in terms of mentoring and peer mentoring and so on. On average, 4,000 students have been supported each year since the 2005/6 academic year, with a yearly allocation of €2 million. The target groups that receive priority funding are across the nine grounds of the equality legislation and match up to local development social inclusion target groups.

### **Examples of Best Practice**

The Roscommon Consortium implemented their fund on a county-wide basis. They cover quite a large geographic area and have had a network of personnel from access officers to Youthreach, VTOS, Traveller Training Centres etc. as well as the secondary schools. The consortium operated the fund through care teams so that they could target those students most in need and ensure an optimal use of their limited resources and personnel within the county. They collaborated with the local VEC in putting together a guide for students about funding and supports on a county-wide basis, which highlighted pieces of funding that are more locally based than nationally based. It was a very good example of partners coming to the table to identify what was required and what would complement their mutual ways of working.

Another example of a local coordination action is the Kerry Access Network (KAN), which comprised of four partnership companies together with the Institute of Technology Tralee, the Kerry Network of People with Disabilities and the Kerry Travellers' Development Project. Their policy of working together on related issues enabled them to share information skills, knowledge and resources. This policy translated into more effective service delivery for the beneficiaries.

Wexford County Partnership has led a targeted local collaboration action that utilises the typical methodology of the area partnership, which involves working closely with those who have a vested interest or stake in meeting the needs of the area. They put in place funding for two courses – a national certificate and a degree – for mature students based in Wexford, which were delivered on an outreach basis by Waterford Institute of Technology. The VEC, FÁS, Health Service Executive and a number of local private bodies came together to support and fund it. It enabled people who had low or no qualifications to



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access further and higher education in a way that they would not otherwise have been able to, because of their rural base, their other commitments or their ability to engage in higher education in the first instance.

### **Community-Based Access to Education**

We have to say and acknowledge that the Millennium Partnership Fund is the only community-based access programme that is currently in place. During a midway-evaluation of the fund, a decision was taken by the Department of Education and Science and the National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education to reorient the fund into a community-based access initiative. Such an initiative attempts to achieve a strong community-based access dimension rather than focusing on the retention aspect, which is a core focus of the current fund and one which is more rightly placed within the remit of the higher education institutions themselves.

Pobal has come to define a concept or model of what a community-based access to education initiative might look like – it is a work in progress to ensure that it happens in a way that is grounded in experience, need and reality. It is something that the community sector and the local development sector can greatly contribute to, through their expertise and access to the local people that really need to be targeted in terms of access and participation in further and higher education. The community-based approach is strategic and integrated and it clearly shows how to work together practically and how to include learners, parents, individuals and so on. It really demonstrates an equality focus in education and how to reduce inequalities in access, participation and outcome.

# Equality and Diversity in Education

**Dr. Ted Fleming**  
*NUI Maynooth*

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## **Introduction**

In 1347 the King of France, Philip VI, ordered the City of Calais to hold out against the English under Edward III. Philip failed to lift the siege and starvation eventually forced the people to surrender to the English. Edward offered to spare the city if any six leaders would give themselves up, presumably to be hanged. Six of the wealthiest burghers of Calais volunteered and walked out almost naked to face certain death – in 1888 Auguste Rodin celebrated their bravery in a wonderful bronze sculpture. Philippa, the wife of Edward, pleaded on their behalf and they were spared. It would have been, she said, a bad omen for her and the child to whom she was about to give birth.

Two discourses were expressed in these events over 650 years ago: the discourse of the king with its talk of war, treaties, death and procedures; and the discourse of the queen talking about mercy and people, with everything taking second place to the welfare of the child. Two similar discourses continue to thrive in our conversations today.

There is the language of the system and the language of the people.

The bottom line in system speak is about procedures, regulations, costs, a preoccupation with policies and guidelines and a rejection of emotional arguments. The bottom line in people speak is about care, concern, mercy, compassion, relationships and an embracing of emotional reactions and feelings.

## **The Educator's Role**

Educators and trainers work in the tension between the language of productivity and the language of care, between the values of throughput and efficiency on the one hand and giving someone the time they need to learn and grow on the other.

Of course, not all system speak is wrong and flawed and not all people speak is unproblematic. For example, it is the system that enshrined the Employment Equality Acts and the Equal Status Acts. Problems arise, however, when one discourse is used inappropriately or when one discourse is ignored, excluded or not acknowledged at all.

To bring our debate up to date it seems to me that one of the great skills of Barack Obama has been his ability to speak both the language of the system and the language of care and people. He has been able to transcend the different discourses of system speak and people speak. He has spoken to crowds of 40,000 people in forensic detail about economics, tax proposals and redistribution of wealth while at the same time continuing to engage, unite and demonstrate concern and care. People speak and system speak have become integrated and connected to each other and people have responded. In a democracy, people speak is the more important because at its best the system should institutionalise people speak.

Educators and trainers inhabit the territory between the system world and the people world. Regulations, laws, targets, procedures, keeping account of clients, tracking, quality assurance – this is all system stuff. We are paid by the system. Supporting learners and dealing with the always complex human

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dilemmas and challenges of becoming more adult and more human through learning is people stuff.

The system demands, and rightly so, that policies and procedures are in place that agree with the requirements of the law on equality, diversity and equal status. Training programmes and monitoring of procedures and practices are essential activities in the implementation of these public policy priorities. The equality agenda that is enshrined in these laws has also put systems in place for vindicating people's rights when they are violated on any of the nine grounds of gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race or membership of the Traveller community.

More is needed because the system merely lays down minimum requirements and objective criteria. People speak requires something different and it emphasises that attitudes and mindsets are crucial too. The system, the law, is not the best way to change minds and attitudes so the additional responsibility falls on educators not only to have the systems in place but also to make sure that our heads and hearts are in tune with the equality and diversity agenda. In educational speak there is a responsibility to ensure that the hidden (and not so hidden) curriculum is also infused with equality.

The system would be happy if we obeyed the law. The ethic of care that I have attempted to identify and articulate speaks not only of following the letter of the law, though that is required, but also of prioritising an ethic of care that is only imperfectly enshrined in the laws.

But eliminating harassment and victimisation from all areas of work and society, making reasonable accommodation for difference, making discrimination a historical memory and encouraging positive action are all major challenges that face us not just as a system imperative but as a human imperative. They involve accepting, for example, people with a disability into our classes not just because this is the law and the requirement but because we as teachers share with them a common humanity. The core of all discrimination rests on ascribing less humanity to those discriminated against.

The challenge for educators and trainers is complex. It requires that we operate within the legal framework and that we relate to all who are different in a careful manner. The implications are twofold. There is a responsibility to learn about the legal and system requirements and an equal need to learn how to operate an ethic of care. In old-fashioned speak, there is a dual mandate to operate legally and morally.

The onus is on us as educators to first of all change ourselves and not only become familiar with the minimal system and procedural requirements but undergo a transformation, if one is required, in thinking, attitudes and understanding of the importance of equality, difference and care.

The system imperative for our sector in adult education and training, with its hugely diverse contexts and situations in which learning occurs, is to ensure that discrimination is not only dealt with appropriately but that it is prevented across the nine grounds.

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The practices, policies, culture and ethos of the training context must be constantly reviewed and reformed. Training the trainers is the password for good practice. The precondition for being able to accept and work with diversity is an openness to change by providers and staff. We are constantly in danger of not getting it right, of misunderstanding what is required, but the insurance against this is the openness to change that is only learned.

We do have to learn our way through the fast-changing world where equality and diversity as policy priorities are evolving as we meet and confront new and different situations. To become more egalitarian and inclusive will only be achieved by learning. Too often the hope is expressed that policies and practices need to be disseminated and enforced. Indeed they do, but the onus is on the leadership of these activities to see that only through learning will the initiatives be rooted in more than systems and rooted in the minds and hearts of those we wish to be more egalitarian and inclusive.

It is not about just following the law, it is about changing people's minds and hearts. Commitment to equality in the workplace, enforcement and implementation are important but the main priority is to ensure that attitudes are changed.

### **Equality and Diversity in Education**

Apart from all the imperatives from the system and the law there is another even more crucial reason why equality and diversity matter in education. And it is not derived from the legal requirements or from the system. This reason does not come from outside education at all. The reason why equality and diversity matter comes from within education itself.

At the heart of education there is the valuing of equality. In the best of philosophy of education there is the valuing of equality. Whether it is Paulo Freire or John Dewey, the idea that one respects the learner and each other is the precondition for any educational activity.

Furthermore, without difference there can be no learning. If we all agreed on everything, learning would be impossible. It is only when cognitive dissonance, disagreement and difference are about that we can change and learn. All the best educators have embraced difference as the precondition for any kind of significant learning. Differences in, for example, gender, family status, age, religion or sexual orientation challenge one's own understandings and provide a welcome opportunity to expand the horizons within which we think, feel, act and relate to others. As educators we need difference, it is the precondition for learning

The burghers of Calais were saved when the language of care triumphed over the language of the system, however, educators add a third set of imperatives. Educators are engaged, as is appropriate in a more complex world, in a set of three languages: of the system, of care and of our own discipline of education.

# **Making Common Sense of Equalities: Some Practical Approaches and Examples**

**Dr. Chris Jude**

*Education Consultant*

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## Introduction

As its title suggests, the focus of this paper is principally on process – on the ‘how’ we ‘make sense of’ and give meaning to equalities through our personal and professional practice. It offers practical examples of the ways in which other public sector professionals seek to achieve equality. It argues that some of the most moving and effective ways involve engaging those who experience inequality more directly in the process of problem defining and solution.

As professionals we are often more articulate and assured about *what* we need to do than we are about *how* to do it. This paper seeks to honour and grapple with the messiness, uncertainty and discomfort of the ‘how’. It takes the position that approaches to achieving equality that come principally from the perspective of compliance may be getting it ‘right’ but are at the same time missing the point.

Achieving change is messy. To make a difference and to achieve change will nearly always mean changing something within ourselves. It is this that makes the process of achieving equality through our professional practice most challenging. It is also what makes it more meaningful and likely to make a difference.

## The Further Education Sector

Further education is a pivotal and every-way-facing sector. It is a critical hinge and interface between different elements of the education system and a critical bearer of some very important social values.

Further education is a transition point between schools, higher education and work. It is fundamentally about social inclusion, a place where those of us who do not fare well at school can be given a second chance. It is a place where people can discover their role in economic participation and competition. Where they can become part of that wider wealth creation and distribution that are the hallmarks of a fair and just society.

Further education can offer experience of the wider benefits of learning, including those that humanise us and equip us for the wider community. At best, it more than repays the resources that are invested in it, perhaps most effectively for those to whom it offers second chances. The cost benefit to the state of good and effective further education can be immense, even though it is acknowledged infrequently. Further education for all of these reasons can be seen as a fulcrum for equality.

## From Compliance to Learning

I take it as read that to achieve equalities, organisations will need to have the following in place:

- Leadership and accountability throughout the system at all levels. For equalities to matter, leadership and accountability for equality has to be distributed and part of everybody’s job.
- Policies that say precisely and distinctly what the organisation commits to achieve. These policies need to be equality proofed and must ‘talk’ to each other. There is not much point in having policies on quality or achievement that do not talk also about equalities.

- The identified intellectual, material and financial resources needed to do the job.
- The partners that can help the organisation to do the things it cannot do on its own. Inequality has a multidimensional reality and demands complex, multicontexted policy responses to tackle it. The role of adult learning and of the voluntary sector in helping us tackle inequality can be critical. So can the housing department, health and social services, the employment office and the justice system.
- Systems to implement, monitor and review the change process. Systems that permeate from top to bottom, including those that help us to assess where we are and those that grade how we are doing against national equality frameworks and standards.

But none of the above can substitute for the very human reality of sitting down together and learning how in our professional roles, individually and collectively, we can make a difference. I mean the process of getting it wrong to get it right. I mean the moving from a culture of compliance that can make us correct in our beliefs and attitudes but rigid to a culture based on conversation and talking.

I say this from the perspective of having worked for years in organisations that have exquisitely theorised and crafted policies and systems on equalities (and we need both to structure and inform our ideas and behaviour) only to learn time and again that to make real change we need to talk and to keep talking. For it is only through talking that we can begin to achieve the real change that starts with ourselves and meets others on an equal basis.

### Towards a Million Change Agents

I want now to illustrate this point through practical examples, starting with a literature review of the research on social change undertaken in 2005 by the National Health Service (NHS) Modernisation Agency. *Towards a Million Change Agents* looks at the ways in which successful, social change movements approach change and contrasts them with the command and control approaches to change commonly adopted by large organisations such as the NHS. Table 1 sets out the difference between the two approaches and is worth spending time on. Consider for a minute the difference between motivating and moving someone.

**Table 1: Contrasting Approaches to Change**

Project / Programme Approach	Social Movements Approach
a planned programme of change with goals and milestones (centrally led)	change is about releasing energy and is largely self-directing (bottom up)
‘motivating people’	‘moving people’
change is driven by an appeal to the ‘what’s in it for me’	there may well be personal costs involved
talks about ‘overcoming resistance’	insists change needs opposition - it is the friend not enemy of change
change is done ‘to’ people or ‘with’ them - leaders to followers	people change themselves and each other - peer to peer
driven by formal systems of change structures (roles, institutions) lead the change process	driven by informal systems structures consolidate, stabilise and institutionalise emergent direction

Source: P. Bate, H. Bevan and G. Robert (2005), *Towards a Million Change Agents*, London: NHS Modernisation Agency.



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The review concludes that change becomes possible when we are able to connect with and mobilise others' 'internal energies and drivers for change'. To do this requires 'harnessing the imagination and participation of the workforce in reinventing the system'. Change cannot be 'created or managed as such but is liberated and released, channelled and enabled'.

The next set of examples is about community engagement in research, policy development and strategy – the engagement of those who experience social exclusion and inequality in the finding of solutions to overcome them. I shall then go on to consider strategies to support organisational change, this time within the context of inclusive learning, and I shall conclude by introducing examples of how further education colleges are supporting equality action in the workplace and on the job.

### **Community Engagement in the Change Process**

Increasingly over the last twenty years or so businesses, political parties, regeneration agencies and charities have adopted consultation processes that invite workers, consumers, citizens and clients to have their say about aspects of organisational strategy, policy or service delivery. The Cooperative Bank involves customers in deciding its ethical investment policy. The Alzheimer's Society invited people affected by Alzheimer's to decide what its research priorities should be.

This focus on involvement, choice and, more recently, personalisation is evident in the range of innovative and imaginative approaches that educators use to engage learners in consultation about learning. In the best of such examples, practitioners are moving beyond consulting with learners through outreach, forums, focus groups, questionnaires and evaluations to developing processes in which communities themselves are invited to lead and to propose solutions to the issues that they see as confronting them.

Many learner voice groups consult either with existing learners or already organised groups. Social exclusion can be about being outside existing groups or networks where such experiences can be shared. The formation of new groupings that offer more flexible and informal ways for people to belong, and that are therefore less easily managed, is fundamental to the achievement of the more democratic and participative learning society that many educators seek passionately to create.

Such groupings share important beliefs. The first is that involving people who have first-hand experience and insight into a problem is more likely to result in solutions that are rooted in local knowledge and expertise. Such solutions are more likely to be acceptable and therefore more likely to work. The second, a variant of the adult education practitioner's experience that 'beginner readers and writers are not beginner thinkers', is that, although people's knowledge may be limited, their capacity to engage, understand and make common sense judgments can be profound.

This is commonly the experience of citizens' juries and other forms of engagement that employ deliberative consultation methods. In these, greater amounts of time are given to considering complex questions and participants can call upon witnesses, scrutinise evidence and deliberate with experts and among themselves. Independent of the commissioning body, the participants'

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findings carry a weight of authority that derives from the independence and integrity of the process. Recognising this, the commissioning body agrees in advance to take on board the jury's recommendations.

Islington Lifelong Learning's Citizen Conference recruited 150 adults in socio-economic groups C2 to DE (in semi-skilled and unskilled occupations) to deliberate on the development of the borough's lifelong learning strategy and paid them for their expert contribution. Fifty per cent of those recruited had not participated in any form of post-statutory learning. Rather than focusing on the barriers to participation, the conference focused instead on what the remaining 50 per cent had done to overcome the barriers.

Expert witnesses were invited from similar communities elsewhere in the UK to report on their success in increasing participation. Participants mentioned not only the expected barriers to participation but also the fear and humiliation that held them back from repeating the experience. What the participants said was moving. As the day went on a spirit of solidarity developed among them and when each group reported on its findings, the members of the other groups cheered.

The groups reported their findings to a panel of decision-makers, including the Chair of Education and the Council's Chief Executive. The panel received the conference findings, explained what they would take forward, how they would do it, what they could not do and why. The majority of participants' proposals were implemented and participants were involved in taking their recommendations forward and received progress reports. Ninety-seven per cent of participants thought that the public should have a say in the issues they were discussing. Ninety per cent said they would recommend taking part in a similar event to someone else.

During the last ten years there has been a flowering of 'learner voice' approaches to research, policy and strategy development and implementation. Older people and young people collaborated on a borough older people's strategy. Local parents carried out research to find out what people wanted from their Surestart programme and then helped to implement it. Community researchers in Bristol developed community education plans with residents.

Local researchers know their area and are familiar with its issues. They are therefore able to form more equal relationships with people and secure their trust. Living locally they are better positioned to sustain the community's engagement and commitment and they have a personal investment in making the community's plans work. In other areas local people are taking the lead in forming the relationships that encourage and support their neighbours to take up learning. Trade union learning representatives, mentors, ambassadors, champions, information and advice professionals and, increasingly, tutors, who are recruited from the workplace or local communities, prove frequently to be much more effective when talking to learners because they share their experiences and know what it takes to participate and stay the course.

### **Inclusive Learning Quality Initiative**

I believe the former Further Education Funding Council's 'Inclusive Learning Quality Initiative' to be a paradigm for organisational equalities work and I want to pay tribute here to the work of Killester College, which spoke at

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the conference last year about its experience of introducing inclusive learning approaches.

The context for the bringing together of inclusive learning and quality in English further education colleges was a long history of inadequate and uneven provision for students with learning and physical disabilities. Led by Professor John Tomlinson, the initiative involved colleges across the country in moving beyond medically defined approaches to the students' learning, or models based on ideas of assimilation or integration, to approaches that seek to achieve a match between each learner's individual requirements and 'the components of the learning environment'.

This match must be effective at three levels, between: the learner and the teacher, the learner and the college and the learner and the education system as a whole. Although initially conceived to advance equalities for one very important group of excluded learners, the approach is based upon finding solutions that are about improving the *quality* of learning and can therefore produce benefits for all learners.

Working in national consortia, colleges were invited to develop systemic approaches to inclusive learning so that, like a thread through tartan, inclusive learning approaches could be shown to run through everything the college did. In approaches similar to those described earlier in this paper, colleges were asked to analyse the ways in which the principles of inclusive learning were embodied in their organisational values – the social glue of organisations, and their vision, mission, policies, strategies, systems and procedures. On the basis that attitudes can take time to change, procedures were taken as important because they model for us how we want to behave and the organisational standards we expect of each other.

Colleges used an audit tool – the Four S's: students, staff, systems and sites – to audit their starting point and to review and evaluate progress. So, for example, Lewisham College listed strategies to increase the students' experience of belonging under the 'students' heading. Under the 'staff' heading it listed the principal as the lead person on equality and multidisciplinary staff teams that were introduced to boost student performance. Under 'sites' the college noted that its accommodation was fit for purpose and context and mostly accessible. It also quoted the mantra staff use to remind themselves why the students' experience of the learning environment can make a difference to their experience of inclusion. Quoting Matthew Arnold, the nineteenth-century poet, critic and inspector of schools, it reads: 'When they have nothing, surround them with splendour.'

A third tool – the learner pathway – was used to analyse the ways in which systems interact to ensure learner equality and inclusion at the pre-entry, entry, on-course and exit stages of learning. Most powerfully, teams of peers drawn from a consortium of colleges were invited to scrutinise each other's equality and inclusion arrangements and provision. Experienced as developmental rather than judgmental, peer scrutiny helped situate leadership and responsibility for change firmly with the sector. As a result of peer scrutiny, one of the thirteen participating colleges radically altered its equality and inclusion strategies.

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## Partnerships for Equality

Tackling inequalities is often most effectively achieved through partnership. I want to take three case studies based on separate initiatives: the 'Every Child Matters' policy and policies to widen participation in higher education and access to medicine.

The first case study is from Quintin Kynaston School in North London. The pupil intake at Quintin Kynaston is 87 per cent black and ethnic minority; 70 per cent of pupils speak English as their second language and 50 per cent of pupils claim free school meals.

The second case study is from Lambeth College in South London. The London Borough of Lambeth experiences very high levels of poverty and deprivation. The college intake is predominantly black and ethnic minority and almost wholly working class.

The third case study is from St George's Medical School, University of London. Medicine in the UK is dominated by white, male, public school entrants. The percentage of entrants from white or ethnic minority working-class backgrounds has remained virtually unchanged despite numerous policy interventions.

The case studies are quoted in full in Appendix A in order to illustrate how wide-ranging and systematic such partnerships must be to have an impact.

## Achieving Equality in the Workplace

I think most of us are looking for a calling, not a job. Most of us, like the assembly line workers, have jobs that are too small for our spirits. Jobs are not big enough for people.

Studs Terkel (1972), *Working*, New York: Avon

I want to conclude by focusing briefly on some of the outstanding work being undertaken by further education colleges to advance equalities in the workplace. The majority of the workforce for the next ten years is already in place. A large proportion of those in work, especially those in semi-skilled and unskilled occupations, are people who are likely to experience inequality at work and within society as a whole.

In a situation where public sector employers are increasingly challenged to compete for young employees and are under growing pressure to match service development with performance improvement, employers are turning instead to developing their existing workforce to undertake the new professional and management roles the sector requires.

The advent of employer-led and responsive policy and funding systems across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is acting as a catalyst for a raft of new partnerships between employers, colleges and training providers to deliver employers' business objectives and to qualify those employees who lack formal qualifications. In the best of such partnerships, employers collaborate in curriculum design, delivery and assessment, and assignments are set that enable employees to tackle critical organisational challenges that can also save resources.

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Newcastle College, which has an outstanding record of integrating partnerships with employers with strategies to address equality and social exclusion, offers examples of the work being accomplished by administrative workers on its NHS Business Administration Foundation Degree:

One learner's first assignment was to provide a written document outlining her organisation's structure, roles and links to other areas. This was taken up by her Trust and now forms the basis of their induction programme. She has worked in the NHS for over 25 years and had never previously had the opportunity to influence policy and practice, and was both astounded and delighted when they adopted her assignment within their organisation.

There was also a work-based project within a physiotherapy department experiencing a budget overspend on equipment. The learner believes that further evaluation will show an ongoing year on year saving of up to £20,000 per annum within the department. This is the first time that she has had the opportunity to undertake a project like this and has been delighted with the outcome. So both the learner and her organisation have directly benefited.

In another example, women employed as teaching assistants in Barking and Dagenham are qualifying as primary teachers. This is a borough with a very poor progression rate to higher education, with high numbers of adults without qualifications and in which teacher recruitment is a challenge. The borough has succeeded in catalysing the women's ambitions for themselves, their children and their wider communities through the foundation degree programme it has set up with the University of East London. See Appendix B for a full description of the programme and its impact.

This is an example of the spirit of equality that we need to liberate within our personal and professional practice and at the heart of our organisational life. It is only by giving this spirit imaginative life that we can begin to create the conditions in which those who experience inequality and exclusion can fashion their own vision and start to live it.

## **Appendix A**

### **Case Study 1**

#### **Every Learner Matters: A Personalised Approach to Raising Attainment**

*Description:* 'Every Child Matters' (ECM) provides the strategic impetus for partnership at Quintin Kynaston School (QK). As a full-service extended school, QK develops a wide range of public, private and voluntary sector partnerships. Partners are represented on the governing body and the concept of wider school partnerships is embedded in all aspects of strategic planning. Partners include the NHS, social services, adult education, youth services, the Tavistock Clinic and the University of Westminster's specific learning differences network. City financial and commercial institutions provide student mentoring and company internships. The partners work with parents and the school to break down the multiple barriers to learning, which, if not tackled, can lead to underachievement. Students can then focus on attaining their academic goals. Local ethnic minority representatives work intensively with students to secure school engagement. A youth club, staffed by newly qualified teachers and sixth formers trained as youth workers, provides informal mentoring and access for students who are underachieving and at risk of dropping out. Students play a key role in delivering the school's ECM strategy, with the Student Leadership

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Board coordinating the contributions of prefects, subject mentors, peer mentors and pastoral support workers.

*Impact:* The school has exemplary intervention strategies to ensure students achieve their full academic and vocational potential. External partners provide the additional interventions students need to overcome the barriers that can affect their futures. The impact can be seen in the school's exam results. Between 1999 and 2007 QK's five GCSE A-C pass rate rose from 12 per cent to 67 per cent and the A2 pass rate from 89 per cent to 99 per cent. In 2007, 97 per cent of Year 13 pupils progressed to higher education.

## **Case Study 2**

### **Engineering Student Success**

*Description:* The key to the success of Lambeth College's Technology Faculty is its broad and inclusive curriculum, which is rooted in leading-edge industrial practice and strong partnerships with schools, universities and employers. The faculty sets its internal standards by what employers and universities expect of students academically and in terms of employability. Courses are designed to engage and motivate students, whatever their starting point, and to enable them to progress through a wide range of engineering specialisms from NVQ1 to higher education. The faculty forms strong and enduring partnerships with schools. Partners work together to create learning experiences for fourteen to sixteen year olds that work to pupils' strengths. Many do not achieve good Key Stage 3 and 4 results or have poor basic skills, but all students are expected to succeed. Students receive learning support and Maths and English are embedded in their subject learning. To ensure progression, learning is assessed, monitored and reviewed regularly and tutors set their students challenging targets. Tutors take pride in their work and encourage it in their students. Pastoral support is provided by college student services teams, which work collaboratively with the academic team to design programmes – such as the 'Pride' and 'Respect' programmes – that build aspirations, provide skills coaching and mentoring.

*Impact:* The distance students travel from entry at the age of sixteen to university at nineteen or older is dramatic. School partnerships open up alternative routes to success and the faculty works assiduously with its students to enable them to progress from low prior levels of attainment to compete successfully for places at universities such as Imperial, Kingston, LSBU, King's and Brunel.

## **Case Study 3**

### **Fair Access to Medicine**

*Description:* The belief that the NHS workforce should reflect the society it serves is the cornerstone of the strategy for the development of medical education at St George's, University of London. In order to study medicine, students must have three A grades at A Level. What is unique about the adjusted criteria scheme at St George's is that bright, able students who have lower A Level grades (Bs and Cs) but are at the top of their class are also able to access medicine. The Head of Widening Participation and his team have created a wide range of interventions and resources to underpin their work. These include school visits and road shows, clinical skills days, taster days, summer schools, an interactive CD-Rom and website, interview preparation DVDs, structured work experience opportunities and mentorship. Raising

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aspirations programmes start at primary school and run through to university entry stage. St George's has formal partnerships with five local schools and one college and works regularly with a further thirty schools and colleges. More than 3,000 children and young people participate in sessions every year.

*Impact:* There are currently forty-two students at St George's who would not have had the opportunity to study medicine if the adjusted criteria scheme had not existed. The scheme is rigorously evaluated. The evaluation shows that those students entering medicine with lower grades who were at the top of their school class are on equal academic terms with students entering with higher grades from schools with very high average A Level performance.

## **Appendix B**

### **Foundation Degree for Teaching Assistants**

*Description:* Barking and Dagenham Council, the University of East London (UEL) and Barking Learning Centre have developed a Foundation Degree for Teaching Assistants (TAs) that builds on the TAs' extensive classroom experience and takes them towards a degree in primary teaching. The partners offer a matrix of courses to support TAs to progress towards the foundation degree, including help with literacy and numeracy. The course curriculum is based on the national curriculum but it also addresses local borough policies and strategies. Scheduled to fit in with school timetables, the programme runs after school at the Barking Learning Centre and is spread over three terms to help students manage their studies. UEL teacher training staff teach on the course to provide continuity for those who want to progress to a full teaching qualification. Students work in small groups locally and use the university's virtual learning environment.

*Impact:* Seventy-eight per cent of the first group of students graduated with a foundation degree. The majority of graduates stayed on for a further year to complete a BA Hons in Facilitating Learning and Development and then progressed to teacher training. The partners see the foundation degree as part of a wider ambition to regenerate the borough. Barking and Dagenham has a history of low education achievement and the second lowest higher education participation rate in the country. The programme is enabling local people to become teachers and to act as role models within the community in which they live.

# **Engaging Inclusive Learning: Shaping Equality Best Practice in Vocational Education and Training**

**Alan Bruce**

*Universal Learning Systems*



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## Overview

One of the central questions informing the emerging dimensions of innovative learning in international contexts is how we work with the needs of specific communities to create a new matrix of opportunities for inclusion, mutual benefit and intercultural encounter. The globalisation process is at the core of labour market change in all countries. This has specific implications for learning specialists and educators in terms of professional training, best practice and standards in approaching the diversity emerging within many communities. The pervasive globalising process means that no discussion on policy or strategy can be undertaken without parallel international understanding and analysis of how new forms of cultural diversity impact on the learning needs of populations subjected to unprecedented levels of change.

In a globalised environment, work becomes an unfolding of a profound wider restructuring of all social, cultural, personal and ethnic relationships. Associated with this is the issue of what the boundaries are, for both traditional and new communities. One key aspect is the role of vocational education and training and its part in the construction of competences for meaningful participation in both society and the labour market. This is further linked to issues around lifelong learning and the ever-developing world of distance learning and technology. As the cost of such technologies diminishes, the only limits become the vision and imagination of the learning community itself.

## The Impact of Globalisation

Globalisation has become one of the most overused words in describing economic, social and commercial trends. The impact of increasingly sophisticated information and communications technologies means that people can discuss and contact each other over vast distances almost instantaneously. It also means that the reach and scope of such technologies is now available across the planet. Such a transformation, in such a relatively short time, poses huge challenges for traditional structures and institutions. People now have the means to compare and contrast issues, to debate and distinguish situations and to have access to examples of diverse approaches and standards practically at the push of a button.

Such an environment, however, masks real difficulties for large sections of the world's population. Such technological resources are not available to all. In fact, research demonstrates that the levels of impoverishment, hunger and marginalisation for the populations in the world's developing countries are increasing. This means that access to education and vocational training – like access to wealth – can be highly unequal.

In addition, globalisation has the potential to increase differences, if not geographically, then in terms of finance and power. Globalisation has been cited as a process that drives down wages and devalues the quality of working conditions. Jobs and processing can be switched with extraordinary speed from one region to another with little concern for local communities or their needs. Finally, globalisation has been regarded by many as a process of cultural and social homogenisation, where alternative views and points of dissent are drowned out by the pre-eminence of the market and seemingly endless cycles of consumerism, consumption and intellectual sterility.

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The impact on education and learning of the globalisation process is equally contradictory. On the one hand, learning resources (such as course materials, accepted terminology, subject range and Internet-based learning) have been criticised for being overwhelmingly centred on US or European models and norms – and, in particular, for being dominated by exclusively English language orientations. On the other, globalisation opens up real possibilities for transformative learning, where knowledge exponentially grows without constraints of national curricula or vested self-interest.

Whatever the concerns, it is clear that globalised processes are now a permanent part of the fabric of twenty-first-century life. This poses many questions for the principles and practices that underlie the science and practice of learning. Cohen and Kennedy (2000) cite six issues around globalisation that impact directly on education and learning:

- Changing concepts of space and time.
- An increasing number of cultural interactions.
- Common problems facing the world's inhabitants.
- Growing interconnections and interdependence.
- Networks of increasingly powerful transnational actors and organisations.
- Synchronisation of all dimensions involved in globalisation.

From the sociological perspective, Göran Therborn analyses the impact of globalisation on the nature, purpose and structure of education in a rapidly evolving world society and locates the changes in higher education under five topical discourses:

- Competition.
- Economics.
- Socio-critical discourse.
- State power (or impotence).
- Cultural and planetary ecology.

Therborn graphically links globalisation to a ruthless system of 'winners' and 'losers' and sees this divide as having an increasing importance for how we structure and appreciate the importance of learning and education. The winners are those for whom an opened world is an opportunity for action, connection to resourceful friends, improved mobility (geographic and social) and enriched access to information. For losers, globalisation is a closure of opportunities, employment options, chances for decent wages or profits and a cultural invasion that subverts important values.

This stark presentation of the contradictory nature of globalisation outlines the challenges for education, vocational training and learning if sense is to be made of the emerging global social order.

### **Impact on Learning and Training**

Over recent decades a revolution has occurred in our understanding of the concepts of knowledge and theories of learning. This revolution has enabled people in all societies to change their thinking about approaches to education

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in significant ways. Education is linked to – but very separate from – structures of schooling. Education systems and schooling structures have mirrored the societies and cultures of which they are a part. They have reflected society in terms of values, structures and processes. Traditional learning systems in the Western world, for example, were modelled around the idea of differential access to learning and knowledge that reflected the stratified class system. Classrooms were structured in strictly didactic ways in terms of pedagogy. Students received, teachers delivered. In addition, classrooms were located in fixed places – the architecture itself reproducing notions of hierarchy, order and control.

Learning today reflects a world that is, in a contradictory sense, both more connected and more fragmented. The impact of globalisation and new technology has produced a planet-wide connection. Deep divisions of labour, chronic levels of underdevelopment and unequal access to wealth have, however, also produced great inequalities and discrepancies in social order and structure.

We live in times of profound economic change. In this environment the very nature of work has been transformed. Vocational education and training systems in many ways lag behind this changed socio-economic reality. Often they reflect realities and structures of former times rather than the needs and circumstances of today.

Among the key issues facing learners today are:

- The relevance of education for future employment prospects.
- The availability of learning.
- Quality and progression routes that are unbiased and transparent.
- Enhanced access for all.
- Removal of barriers around inherited prejudice, discrimination and exclusion.
- Addressing issues around cultural and ethnic difference.
- Management of diversity.
- Flexibility to meet individual learning needs in non-traditional contexts.

Vocational education and training have evolved as useful methods to meet some of these issues. They also encompass a range of concepts and methods rooted in the structure and interaction of education and society. But both methods and policies are frequently rooted in environments where traditional social divisions and historic legacies of inequality have not been addressed.

Change and learning are two sides of the same coin. Accelerating change confronts communities, professionals and organisations with new problems. In turn, these demand new skills. The market selection of change-oriented firms further accelerates innovation and change. There is nothing to indicate that the process will slow down in the near future. Rather, the deregulation of product markets and the entrance of new competitors to the world market will give new momentum to these processes.

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This is one reason why, over the next couple of decades, innovation policy will be crucial to economic performance. A major objective must be to contribute to the learning ability of firms, knowledge institutions and people. At the same time society must address the possible negative effects of the learning economy in terms of social and regional polarisation or imbalance. The challenges posed by the globalising learning economy need policy responses based on an understanding of the emergence of new socio-economic and organisational contexts, especially in Europe.

## **European Dimensions**

In the recent past the European Union, national governments and regional and local authorities have developed new policy instruments – and reused old ones – to tackle these emerging new challenges. However, in most cases this amounts to incremental adaptation of old policy instruments rather than the introduction of radically new mechanisms. The response to the new trends is often partial or fragmented. It is useful, therefore, to provide a more comprehensive picture of what is going on in the field of innovation.

Vocational education and training can contribute to a new vision and policy paradigm at all levels of social learning by addressing some of the most salient aspects of the globalising learning economy and associated policy implications. This is a challenge, given the theoretical framework in which the notion of ‘learning economy’ is embedded, especially as this is rapidly evolving in the contexts of economic restructuring and equality of access.

The EU’s emphasis on a social market model and partnership has allowed the creation of thematic linkages across the Union. An influx of money, ideas and standards has created new prospects for social inclusion. Proactive policies have made a real difference in underlining the positive benefits from the inclusion of new or marginalised communities in traditional workforces. If equality is located in a context of learning, it is enhanced greatly in the context of innovation. The opportunities of including those traditionally excluded become not problems to be solved but challenges in advancing wider creative processes.

Grave problems persist throughout the EU, despite achievement of free movement of goods and labour. Unemployment remains disturbingly high. Social and economic inequality have increased. Racism and discrimination have grown. In addition to all this, the EU has expanded to twenty-seven members, bringing new issues and problems and requiring adjustments at every level.

The European Employment Strategy is based on four key themes that national employment action plans in each member state are now required to reflect: employability, entrepreneurship, adaptability and equal opportunities. Despite these themes, basic issues around intercultural education and equality are being addressed, if at all, in a fragmented and piecemeal manner. Key issues around access, inclusion, training and competence development are often neglected.

Issues around identity, migration, mobility and interculturalism are now central for learning and socio-economic policies for the future of Europe. This situation has been recognised at official level. Speaking in June 2008 the Commissioner

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for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, Vladimír Špidla, stated that promoting tolerance was not enough – racism required policies on diversity, laws and anti-discrimination measures. He pointed out that ongoing issues remained in tackling racism due to cost implications, ambiguities, resistance and an inadequate focus on human rights.

An assumption in Europe of stable work patterns and linear development is no longer possible. As a result, learning and vocational training systems must innovate and respond accordingly.

### **Equality and Diversity Contexts**

For contemporary industry, issues of diversity and equality are pressing ones for a number of connected reasons. In this, industry partly reflects the demographic, social and cultural changes of the wider socio-economic environment. It also reflects the powerful challenges and struggles in the organisation, structure and control of work and labour conditions that have emerged with a new globalised environment.

The current context of equality and diversity is concerned with the composition of the workforce in terms of multiple elements of identity: race, religion, gender, language or nationality for example. The nature of the modern labour market displays increased complexity and diversity emerging from social change and population movements. This links to issues such as:

- Forced migration.
- Regional impoverishment.
- Increased participation rates for women.
- The changing nature of work itself (due to technological advances and improvement).
- Legacies of colonialism and racism.
- Implications of legislation and human rights practice.

These issues touch on diversity in regard to rights, ethical practice, conflict resolution and promotion of equal opportunities. The labour market therefore manifests changes in work practice that have been conditioned, on the one hand, by the process of globalisation and, on the other, by the enactment of equality-based legislation in various jurisdictions.

Equal status for all (and particularly for those who have been traditionally excluded by reason of prejudice or discrimination) poses a set of challenges for social institutions apart from the labour market. The added impact of EU rules produces a strong emphasis on common standards both to affirm rights and to regulate workforce conditions. Both European and US concepts of diversity management in labour market contexts have a number of shared concerns. These include:

- Best practice in the human resources development function.
- Maximisation of the potential of new and existing labour market participant categories.
- Reduction of social and economic cost in dealing with diverse labour groups.

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- Conformity to national or transnational legislative requirements.
  - Tapping into the creativity latent in diverse and non-standard work groups and perspectives.
  - Innovative responses to inclusion, design and differentiated market sectors.

In European terms, management of diversity has been centrally linked to the enforcement of principles of equality among citizens and the prohibition of discrimination on a wide range of specified grounds. While legislation varies significantly between all member states, in most there remains a gap between the legal prohibition of discrimination and the actual outcomes for traditionally disadvantaged groups. In all countries, legal proof of discrimination tends to be very difficult.

The dramatic changes in employment and economic performance in recent years relate to the identified fact that European rights are in fact increasingly restricted. They are sometimes seen to be available only to European citizens and not to the millions of external workers, refugees and asylum seekers who have arrived in Europe. The extension of equality of rights of participation, citizenship and access to all citizens (and indeed non-citizens) is now a fundamental question of European social policy.

Managing diversity and equality approaches can be seen, at a minimum, as tools to enable vocational educators and trainers to adapt to challenges posed by differentiated workforces (where expectations and levels of communication may even be sources of potential conflict). In a wider context, they may be seen as powerful resources to benefit from external change processes and to tap into levels of creativity and potential produced by radical departures from past certainties.

The critical need for international engagement and learning needs to be emphasised in vocational training contexts (as much from a US as a European perspective). Rights and inclusion are international issues – a fact not as widely represented in professional trainer development as it should be. The removal of barriers to participation will ultimately be about asserting the primacy of a global vision that challenges traditional complacencies as well as inherited structures. This emphasises the best practice and innovative quality that underscore effective international engagement and learning.

Barriers to equality stem from prejudice and ignorance. The removal of barriers can be addressed (at least formally) by legislation and monitoring practice. Deeper transformation can be expedited most rapidly by educators seizing the opportunities offered by social difference and incorporating them into the employment process itself in innovative learning paradigms. This places a critical focus on the training of trainers to achieve mainstreamed equality approaches and attitudes.

Advanced training and education to bring communities to a deeper understanding of the potential offered by equality and diversity has been seen in a number of initiatives. These learning initiatives encompass:

- Awareness programmes.
- Joint employer/trade union actions to combat discrimination.

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- Training supports for equality measures.
  - Access to further education and development avenues.
  - Coordination of state and private initiatives.
  - Measures targeted at SMEs (where real blockages remain).
  - Applied learning around equality-specific legislation.

Equality and diversity are common concerns. Such a focus provides a valuable network of specialists who have:

- Deeper understanding of equality and diversity issues and their relevance and application in the workplace.
- Comprehensive knowledge of policies, procedures and legislation.
- Understanding of difference, stereotyping and prejudice.
- Understanding of diversity at work.
- Skills to design and develop toolkits for work-based equality interventions.

### **Key Themes**

The removal of barriers to participation and the enhancement of embedded equality approaches will ultimately be about asserting strategic policy as well as the techniques necessary to embed best practice. A sense of vision about what society means, and about what it is for, can inform the creative process of training and skill development interventions. It can give a sense of value and direction to the design and development of employment structures. A lack of informed understanding about the meaning of work in contemporary society means that we could be forever condemned to repeat past mistakes.

The changes produced in both the human and technical aspects of the globalisation process shape how global education may now include various learning communities previously excluded by reason of prejudice, discrimination or remoteness. We need to support learners across the globe to transcend barriers and address conflict and persistent discrimination by means of skilful application of potent technological tools in the metamorphosis of traditional educational systems to meet unprecedented levels of socio-economic transformation.

This also speaks of the critical importance of innovation and vision in addressing the key priorities for developing learning and transnationality to combat socio-economic marginalisation. It is of interest that marginalised groups themselves can often be critically important springboards for innovative learning methodologies.

Generating new intercultural learning is vital for the vocational education and training sector for a number of reasons. It develops the discourse by a focus on connected themes such as:

- Intercultural communications.
- Learning policy in contexts of ethnic diversity.
- Conflict transformation initiatives.
- Human rights frameworks for educational access.

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- Innovation in work and labour market transformation around diversity.
  - Transformational learning in social change.
  - Permanent immigration – developing multicultural responses.
  - From digital divide to universal access.
  - Implications for policy, research and innovation.
  - Elephants in the room – war, violence and the cost of exclusion.

Transformative vocational education and training does not merely respond passively to existing realities. It anticipates change and re-engineers itself as a hotspot of innovation and creativity in devising the skills, knowledge, attitudes and competences that challenge existing structures and point to new approaches. In responding to the crises of today's world, this can play a critical role in offering alternatives – as well as in enhancing the extent and quality of participative inclusion.

Such transformative vocational education can be characterised by a number of themes that include:

- Planning for equal outcomes.
- Planning for equal access.
- Developing systematic approaches that avoid tokenism.
- Learning from and adapting to difference.
- Learning to learn and unlearn and learn again (Toffler, 1999).
- Fostering innovation and equality.

Embedding equality in vocational education and training (VET) contexts will imply a set of targets. These include:

- Developing recognition of qualifications from other countries and avoiding euro-centrism.
- Universal design principles.
- Achieving best practice and developing inclusive communications.
- Improved emphasis on the training of trainers.
- Developing multilingualism in the host environment.
- More extensive use of advanced learning technologies.
- Improved review, evaluation and research capacity.
- Setting clear policy targets and embedding equality norms as meaningful and measurable targets for all VET stakeholders.

It is also appropriate for the vocational education and training sector to revisit the concept of mainstreaming itself in the context of increased diversity, equality and inclusion needs. Our very notion of the mainstream may be inherently discriminatory if we expect new populations merely to adapt to unchanging, existing realities. One of the unexpected benefits of increased diversity is the opportunity for the population as a whole to redefine what mainstream is and to engage in the questioning dialogue that sees possibilities for mutual benefit and sustainable change in challenging and transcending mainstream limitations by advancing to newer formulations of community and identity.



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Best business and work practices cannot happen without organisational change, commitment and leadership. As learning organisations (and communities) change to accept and promote diversity they find that an equality ethos is not incompatible with performance outcomes.

Above all, we are left with that Hegelian sense of the Other and the need to acknowledge rather than confront it. In engaging with difference, learning structures and methodologies, vocational education and training modes have the opportunity to advance truly transformational learning. This plans for globalised realities – while at the same time it learns from difference and anticipates new learning needs. It also provides a challenge to accepted norms around stereotypes and norms of indigenous cultures. At its most profound, equality-informed learning systems allow us to reconstruct ourselves by an engagement with voices, traditions and experiences very different from metropolitan conceits. It moves us from dated national limitations to globalised engagement where concepts of respect, tolerance and liberation can be advanced for mutual enrichment.

The quantum leap to equality via quality, diversity, innovative vocational learning and best practice is what proactive and inclusive vocational education and training learning strategies are about. The lessons are clear. Equality is not a simply a destination, but rather it is a starting point for real learning opportunities that provide leadership and benefit for all.

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# **Challenges for the Further Education and Vocational Training Sector: the Needs of an Increasingly Diverse Workplace of the Future**

**Peter Cassells**

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## **Introduction**

To assess the scale of the challenges, and indeed opportunities, that the further education and training sector faces in meeting the needs of an increasingly diverse workforce, we need to look at the context that is driving change in the world of work and in learning.

## **A Country in Transition**

We know that Ireland's prosperity and social achievements of the past decade are now in a critical period of transition. To maintain our living standards and high levels of employment, we cannot rely on low skill, lower paid, low value activities.

The increasing integration of the economies of the world, advances in information and communications technologies and workplace innovations have accelerated the need for countries such as Ireland to shift to higher skilled, high value-added, high income jobs. Also, to meet people's changing needs, we require a more effective and efficient delivery of public services, especially in areas such as health, transport and education.

To make this transition, we have as a country rightly identified the need to invest more in infrastructure, to promote Research and Development and to build capacity in science and technology. Ireland's success in making this transition will depend on the knowledge, skill, abilities and ingenuity of our people. Learning in all areas of the private and public sectors must be prioritised and must move up one step.

## **People are Changing**

The need to increase learning in all areas is coming at a time when the workforce is becoming increasingly diverse through demographic changes that include:

- Increased female participation. Women are expected to account for 45 per cent of the workforce by 2015.
- A larger number of single-parent households. The number of lone-parent families with children aged under twenty increased from 73,000 in 1996 to 125,000 in 2006.
- A reduced number of young people entering the workforce as a result of the falling birth rate.
- An ageing workforce, where four out of ten workers will be over the age of forty-five by 2015.
- The effects of immigration. Almost 300,000 foreign nationals aged fifteen and over are living in Ireland, of whom over 200,000 are in employment. Non-Irish nationals account for almost one-quarter of the total workforce in hotels and restaurants.

Diversity is also exemplified in engagement with people with disabilities, those from diverse religious backgrounds and sexual orientations as well as those from different cultures, including the Traveller community.

Efforts to increase learning, upgrade knowledge and improve competencies throughout the workforce will also have to address a number of different challenges including:

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- By 2015, 45 per cent of all jobs in Ireland will be for third-level graduates.
  - By 2015, one in four people will be employed in so-called knowledge-intensive jobs.
  - At the same time, skilled and semi-skilled work in manual, clerical and service occupations will still account for half of all jobs in Ireland.
  - 80 per cent of the predicted workforce in 2015 is currently employed.

In addition, people are leading more complex lives, placing more emphasis on personal development, seeking a better balance between family and workplace responsibilities and demanding greater choice, higher standards and more flexibility in the delivery of services.

### **Assessment of Current Position**

To assess the current position and advance the debate on how best to support the transformation of our workplaces in this transition to a so-called knowledge society, the National Centre for Partnership and Performance (NCP), at the request of the government, established a Forum on the Workplace of the Future.

According to that Forum, many aspects of work organisation, the level of qualifications and access to learning are out of sync with the changing world of work. The Forum showed that:

- Ireland ranks well behind other European countries for access to lifelong learning.
- Almost one in every five secondary school students does not complete the Leaving Certificate. Poor literacy and numeracy are still a serious problem amongst older workers.
- There is also a serious equal opportunities divide, with most further education going to those with qualifications: 63 per cent of those with third-level qualifications; 35 per cent of those with no qualifications; 28 per cent of unskilled workers. There is also less access for women, older workers, migrants and people with disabilities.
- There is a serious underutilisation of the existing workforce, including a serious underutilisation of women's high standards of education and skills. One in three immigrant workers holds a third-level qualification yet occupies a job that does not match his or her skills level.
- Equality and diversity tend to be stand-alone initiatives in organisations and mainly relate to compliance with legislation.

### **Blueprint for the Future: The National Workplace Strategy**

The Forum on the Workplace of the Future mapped out a vision of what the workplace of the future will look like. In addition to being agile, customer centred, knowledge intensive, responsive, networked, highly productive, involved and participatory, such workplaces, the Forum concluded, will need to be continually learning and proactively diverse.

The Forum's 2005 report also concluded that the 'same energy that was invested in Ireland's economic transformation over the past two decades now needs to be applied to transforming Ireland's workplaces for the 21st century'.

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The forty-two recommendations in the Forum's report were adopted by the government as the National Workplace Strategy. This strategy identifies five strategic priority areas in which action is currently being concentrated:

- Commitment to workplace innovation.
- Capacity for change.
- Developing future skills.
- Access to opportunities.
- Quality of working life.

In the area of learning, the strategy targets the removal of barriers to further education and training, especially for workers in low skilled jobs and those with narrow skills sets in vulnerable areas of the economy. In the case of equality and diversity, the strategy promotes diversity as an integral part of every organisation's culture and management.

As part of the National Workplace Strategy, the Equality Authority and the NCPP commissioned a report on the *Business Impact of Equality and Diversity* (Monks, 2007). This study provides a valuable and accessible review of the research evidence on the relationship between workplace initiatives on equality and diversity and organisational performance. It establishes three key characteristics for an inclusive workplace: being free from discrimination, valuing diversity and proactively pursuing equality. It identifies diversity as one key driver for change in the Irish workplace.

Also as part of the National Workplace Strategy, the EQUAL Community Initiative in Ireland – which is an EU programme working to respond to discrimination and inequality in the labour market – published a report in September 2007 entitled *Delivering a More Inclusive Workplace*. Under the EQUAL Community Initiative, seven projects were established with the specific objective of influencing national policy in the area of inclusive workplaces. Since 2005 these projects have been piloted across a range of employment sectors, with a view to making the workplace more inclusive for people with disabilities, older workers, women, the long-term unemployed and minority groups. A number of the projects had a significant input from FÁS and from the further education sector.

The NCPP and FÁS (2006) have also undertaken and published a collaborative action research project to identify and promote effective learning in public and private organisations in Ireland.

### **Challenges for Further Education and Vocational Training**

The National Workplace Strategy and the national partnership programme *Towards 2016* have identified access to opportunities and lifelong learning as **the** priority area for action over the next three years. This should provide significant opportunities for the further education and training sector. To avail of these opportunities:

- All programmes (including accreditation) should be reviewed and adapted to reflect the changing world of work.

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- Further education and training should be accessible to all and responsive to the diverse needs of individuals (person centred). We need to make access to lifelong learning a reality for everybody.
  - Equality and diversity should be integrated into all programmes and be reflected in the strategies and culture of education and training providers.
  - Delivery of further education and training needs to be more flexible and responsive to diverse needs.
  - Adequate funding should be provided for further education and vocational training to reflect the central role of lifelong learning in meeting the needs of a diverse workforce and building the workplace of the future.
  - The education and training needs of further education providers must be supported to enable them to respond to the changing needs of an increasingly diverse workplace.

The principal challenge for the sector, as the theme of this conference implies, is to mainstream equality in learning opportunities for all people, taking account of their diversity.

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# **Mainstreaming Equality in the Kerry Education Service**

**Barney O'Reilly**

*Kerry Education Service*



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## Introduction

The invitation to make a presentation at this conference required that I attempt to put some sequence and narrative around what was, from a Kerry Education Service point of view, an organic and, at times, a chaotic process. It was conducted while we tried to go about our primary business of providing an education service and responding to the wide range of pressures, both internal and external, which have been bearing down on us over the last five to six years. That we should be asked to try to reflect on our experiences and to present them to a forum such as this is significant as an endorsement of what we have attempted to do – even if it comes as something of a surprise to us that what goes on in Kerry should be of interest to others.

## Origins

Kerry Education Service is the VEC – the vocational education committee – for Kerry, and it may be helpful to give a brief sense of the evolution of the organisation as a context for the paper.

Vocational education committees have their origins in the last years of the nineteenth century, that period between the fall of Charles Stewart Parnell and the start of the Great War and the 1916 Rising, when British policy was attempting to ‘kill Home Rule with kindness’.<sup>1</sup> British policy saw the establishment in 1899 of a specifically Irish government Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction (DATI) as new structures for a new century.<sup>2</sup> Together with the land reform of the Land Acts and the new democratic local government structures provided for in the Local Government Act 1898, this would be part of a modernisation programme, an economic and social development programme for Ireland that would help sustain the Union. Its main Irish advocate was the modernising Meath landowner, founder of the Co-operative Movement and Unionist politician, Horace Plunkett. Technical instruction committees were set up under the aegis of the newly formed local authorities, but with business and other local representation, to provide forms of technical education likely to lead to improved economic performance.

Three characteristics of these origins remain with the VEC systems of the twenty-first century. First, the link with the local authorities that formally appoint the members of the VECs and the common forms of shared local/central planning and accountability arrangements (for much of the twentieth century there were shared funding responsibilities also, but these were eroded during the major changes of the 1970s). The second surviving characteristic is the clear articulation of, and focus on, what, since the 1960s, is termed the ‘human capital’ formation role of education. The technical instruction system was set up to provide for increased productivity and economic development for society and improved life-chances for its learners. Programmes were organised on both a full-time and a part-time basis, and in both permanent schools and in ad-hoc out-centres. The third remaining aspect is easiest stated in the negative: the absence of a formal role for church or religious authorities in the governance of the system, which made the system distinctive and frequently embattled on that basis.

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1 Lyons, F.S.L. (1973), *Ireland Since the Famine*, London: Fontana, Part II, pp. 202–224.

2 In 1904 Horace Plunkett published a controversial book entitled *Ireland in the New Century* (reissued by Irish Academic Press in 1982).

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While these characteristics have endured, this system of technical instruction has gone through three major periods of change since the early twentieth century. The first took place on independence and the creation of the Free State. It started with the technical instruction service being incorporated into the new Department of Education in 1926, and was underpinned by the 1930 Vocational Education Act. This Act added a new form of education and school – continuation education and continuation schools (later known as vocational schools) – to the Irish system. These were designed to provide for a specific form of continuation of primary school education that would prepare young people for technical education and for immediate employment. A form of ‘poor man’s secondary education system’ was created, at which a two-year programme was available to young people who were not in a position to avail of the few, and relatively high cost, secondary schools that were provided mostly by religious bodies. A national system of mainly rural vocational schools serving the social and economic ideas and ideals of the early decades of the independent Irish state followed. By the 1960s there were twelve continuation or vocational schools in Kerry. In Kerry, and nationally, about 27 per cent of the secondary school population attended these schools, which were still endearingly, and otherwise, referred to as ‘the Techs’.

The 1930s system received a major overhaul as part of the 1960s proposal to unify the second-level school system and to provide universal secondary schooling in Ireland. As well as a major growth in the size of schools, these reforms brought about a significant character change for the vocational schools. The national Intermediate and Leaving Certificate examinations were now available to the vocational school students. When the vocational Group Certificate and the secondary Intermediate Certificate were abolished and merged in the 1980s as a new Junior Certificate for students at the end of their compulsory schooling (aged fifteen), the role of the old vocational school had been significantly modified.

The most recent phase of change for the VECs came with the Education Act 1998 and the Vocational Education (Amendment) Act 2001. These followed an extensive period of consultation and debate throughout the 1980s and 1990s, with a number of Green and White Papers issued over the period and much public and academic debate. Governance issues and the possibilities for local/regional education authorities were central to these debates and together the two Acts can be seen as the formal outcome of these deliberations.

For VECs, the Acts meant a modernisation of structures, the inclusion of parents and staff in a broadening of the management voices, new distinctions between the reserved functions to be performed by the committee and the executive functions to be performed by the Chief Executive and staff. There were also new requirements in respect of planning and evaluation of service delivery, via five-year strategic plans known as education plans, as well as annual service plans and formal annual reports. The final point, and in some ways the provision of most significance, is the language used in the 2001 Act in respect to the functions of VECs: the Act speaks of the functions of VECs in terms of ‘education and services ancillary thereto’.

What started as technical instruction and mutated to vocational education is now unencumbered by any qualifier. Potentially, the role of the VEC is greatly open to expansion. The 2001 legislation specifically allows for the Minister for

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Education and Science to assign additional functions to VECs. This last point is of some relevance to the name 'Kerry Education Service' as used by the VEC in Kerry.

### **Kerry Education Service – The VEC in Kerry**

The name 'Kerry Education Service' was adopted in 1998 when the two Kerry VECs – Town of Tralee and County Kerry – amalgamated at the height of the national transition process. The rationale for the Kerry decision was that the new name more accurately reflected the work and the focus of the organisation.

There are eight schools in the Kerry Education Service (KES), attended by approximately 2,600 students, 27 per cent of the Kerry secondary school population. There are four community-based adult education centres – operating out of reconditioned former vocational schools. The total number of adult learners is approximately 12,000 annually, about 11 per cent of the adult population of the county. Some 200 adults are full-time students. In the course of a year, KES provides classes in 100 to 120 different locations throughout the county.

KES runs the Cappanalea Outdoor Education Centre on the shores of Caragh Lake in the MacGillycuddy Reeks as a support service to primary and post-primary schools and other education programmes. In conjunction with Tralee Town Council, KES runs Tralee Sports Centre, which is both a school facility and a public utility, with swimming pool etc. Apart from small grant aid for the Cappanalea centre, these facilities operate on a self-financing basis. Arrangements for community use of sports facilities is a characteristic of our schools, particularly those which are sole providers for their area.

Table 1 indicates the numbers of persons employed by KES. Sixty-six per cent of the total staff are female.

**Table 1: Numbers Employed by KES**

<b>Staff</b>	<b>Number</b>
Teachers (schools)	358
Teachers (adult education)	570
Teachers (in other organisations)	11
Administration	51
Sports	18
Caretaking etc.	36
Total	1,044

Source: Illustrative data taken from KES Equality Review, (2005).

### **Equality as an Issue for VECs**

Given the background position I have outlined about the division of labour in the Irish education system for second-level schooling, it is unlikely that you will be surprised to find that social inequality has been a perennial issue for VECs. The continuation schools were designed to be a 'poor man's secondary school system'. VEC-related documentation from the 1940s and 1950s in particular is full of examples of principals and teachers, and CEOs and committee members, complaining about the constraints on graduates of the vocational schools. The introduction in 1947 of the Group Certificate examinations for the

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end of the two-year continuation programme came after a campaign in which the importance of certification for employment was highlighted – particularly in the growing semi-state companies such as ESB, Bord na Móna and the Irish Sugar Company. In the 1950s the lack of access to secretarial and administrative jobs for vocational school graduates was a common theme in VEC circles. The Civil Service gave preference to the secondary school Intermediate Certificate and did not recognise the Group Certificate for recruitment purposes. Prestigious jobs such as air hostesses with Aer Lingus were also off-bounds for the vocational school graduates of the 1950s.

The major changes to the Irish education system that commenced in the 1960s were introduced under the slogan of 'Equality of Educational Opportunity' and can be seen as a strategy for increased social mobility. For the most part, these changes can be understood as a major shift on the part of the whole system, from education with a humanist, cultural and religious focus, to the paradigm of education as 'human capital development', which was the space from which the VEC sector had set out. But social reproduction processes still dominated. In 1989 the California-based sociologist Michael Hout entitled his study of social mobility in Ireland *Following in Father's Footsteps* and concluded that 'Inequalities are ingrained in the Irish education as it is structured'.<sup>3</sup> In a later article he coined the phrase 'maximally maintained inequality' to refer to the strong maintenance in intergenerational educational inequality in Ireland.<sup>4</sup>

In Greaney and Kellaghan (1984)<sup>5</sup> and in a range of Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) studies, it is plain that the operation of selective admissions by school type has ensured that vocational schools have a significant over-representation of students with social and economic disadvantages.<sup>6</sup> In a more recent publication (Hout, 2007),<sup>7</sup> Hout utilises more contemporary and comparative data and concludes:

Educational stratification works like a queue. The initial phases of educational expansion – first of some schooling, then of secondary schooling, and for the last 50 years post-secondary schooling – benefit the privileged families at the front of the queue. The benefits pass down the hierarchy. (p. 37)

Taking the long view of the development of Irish education, he says:

Ireland is among the nations with the highest association of educational achievement across the generations. Rapid education expansion has accorded most young Irish people the opportunity for substantial upward mobility, but the system preserves the rank order among them to an extent found in few other nations. (p. 36)

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3 Hout, M. (1989), *Following in Father's Footsteps: Social Mobility in Ireland*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, p. 329.

4 Raftery, A.E. and Hout, M. (1993), 'Maximally Maintained Inequality: Expansion, Reform and Opportunity in Irish Education', *Sociology of Education*, vol. 66 (Jan.), pp. 41–62.

5 Greaney, V. and Kellaghan, T. (1984), *Equality of Educational Opportunity in Irish Schools*, Dublin: Educational Company.

6 See footnote 8 below as well as Hannon, D. and Boyle, M. (1987), *Schooling Decisions*, Dublin: ESRI paper 136; Hannon, D. and Shortall, S. (1991), *The Quality of Their Schooling*, Dublin: ESRI paper 151.

7 Hout, M. (2007), 'Maximally Maintained Inequality Revisited: Irish Educational Stratification in Comparative Perspective', in B. Hilliard and P. M. Nic Giolla (eds), *Changing Ireland in International Comparison*, Dublin: The Liffey Press, pp. 23–40.

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All the boats have been lifted – but they maintain the distance between them. The structural questions around socio-economic inequality have been prominent in VEC discourse since the 1940s and have lost none of their urgency – basically because the policy responses required have not been forthcoming. More recently these debates have taken the form of discussions around the operation of published school admissions policies. In this context, VECs see themselves as operating really inclusive admissions policies and practices.

The 1980s, particularly during Gemma Hussey's time as Minister for Education, saw the introduction of a gender equality discourse into Irish education – via the Women's Movement – and the addition of gender equality issues to VECs' working agendas. Again the work of the ESRI was significant in providing the data and the language with which to talk about stereotyping in curriculum provision at schools.<sup>8</sup> As an aside, it is appropriate to mark the work of Pat Clancy and Kathleen Lynch of University College Dublin and Denis O'Sullivan of University College Cork, as well as the ESRI mentioned above, all of whom did much to extend the boundaries of our thinking on equality issues with important Irish studies since the 1980s.<sup>9</sup>

Working with the establishment of a range of new national adult education initiatives since the 1980s – Traveller education programmes, programmes for the long-term unemployed (VTOS), programmes for early school leavers (Youthreach) and programmes for a range of socially excluded adults (literacy, BTEI and community education programmes) – VEC personnel were sensitised to the social inclusion agenda and we broadened our appreciation of equality issues beyond the concept of equality as 'equality of educational opportunity' alone.<sup>10</sup> The establishment of workplace partnerships, under the aegis of national partnership agreements, and the employment equality and equal status legislation had significant impact on our attention to, and our framework for, addressing equality issues.

### **Equality/ Respect Becomes a Central Issue for KES**

The above contexts to our work were important in developing a consciousness within KES staff of the significance of equality matters. But they did not prompt us to take any particular or prioritised initiatives. It took a home-grown crisis to do that.

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8 Hannon, D. *et al.* (1983), *Schooling and Sex Roles*, Dublin: ESRI paper 114; Hannon, D. and O'Riain, S. (1993), *Pathways to Adulthood in Ireland*, Dublin: ESRI; Hannon, D. *et al.* (1996), *Coeducation and Gender Equality*, Dublin: Oak Tree Press.

9 Pat Clancy's series of national studies on 'Participation in Higher Education' published by the Higher Education Authority since 1982 were important, as were: Lynch, K. (1989), *The Hidden Curriculum: Reproduction in Education. A Reappraisal*, London: Falmer Press; Lynch, K. (1999), *Equality in Education*, Dublin: Gill & Macmillan; Lynch, K. and Lodge, A. (2002), *Equality and Power in Schools*, London: Routledge Falmer Press; Lodge, A. and Lynch, K. (2004), *Diversity at School*, Dublin: Equality Authority. Baker, J. *et al.* (2004), *Equality: From Theory to Action*, London: Palgrave provides a comprehensive theoretical framework. Denis O'Sullivan's work has culminated in a recent *magnum opus* which I find very illuminating: O'Sullivan, D. (2005), *Cultural Politics and Irish Education since the 1950s: Policy Paradigms and Power*, Dublin: Institute of Public Administration.

10 Helen Keogh outlines how the equality agenda operated through these programmes and presents the lessons on a related coordinated project that operated using these programmes in Keogh, H. (2007), 'Education Equality Initiative: Policy and Practice Lessons, 2000–2006', in Equality Authority, *Mainstreaming Equality: Promoting Equality and Accommodating Diversity in Further Education, Training and Labour Market Programmes. 2006 Conference Proceedings*, Dublin: Equality Authority.

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The home-grown crisis took the form of two fairly serious cases of workplace bullying in the organisation in the late 1990s. The management of these cases, which occurred in schools, alarmed us. It appeared that there were very poor, indeed dysfunctional, management practices operating in some sections of the organisation. We had neither the skills nor the tools – in terms of codes of practice and agreed procedures – to deal with them. So, first we knew we had to develop a set of procedures to deal with the cases in hand.

Unions took the stance that they would only allow investigation to take place under the terms of nationally agreed codes and procedures, so it became necessary to become engaged with national negotiations between the body representing VECs, the Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA), and the various unions that operate in the VEC sector. This too was an educative process, exposing myself and others in the organisation to a range of procedural and regulatory issues from which we had been previously shielded.

These cases fell to be dealt with shortly after the amalgamation of the two VECs in Kerry to form KES, which gave us some cover under which to start a programme of organisational culture change and awareness building. As part of the case management programme with the union representing the staff – the Teachers' Union of Ireland (TUI) – and with the help of the newly formed personnel department established following the amalgamation, a programme of awareness training and policy building was started. Awareness training sessions, jointly chaired by KES management and national union officials, were held. The process built towards an agreed 'Charter for Dignity in the KES Workplace', which was developed, formally adopted and promulgated throughout the organisation.

### **The Equality Review 2004**

While this process was under way, I attended a briefing session hosted by the Equality Authority in 2001, which presented to Kerry employers details of a workplace equality review/audit programme. The programme was funded by the Equal Opportunities Committee established as part of the Equal Opportunities National Framework, agreed under the *Sustaining Progress* National Partnership Agreement. It was administered by the Equality Authority.<sup>11</sup> This seemed to me to be an ideal vehicle for addressing what I saw as the underlying difficulties that had come to the surface in the bullying cases with which we were dealing. It would also provide a mechanism to develop the work that we were engaged in with the TUI and through our own reorganisation and modernisation work via the partnership structures.

The KES local partnership working group and the KES/TUI ad-hoc working group were the main vehicles used to explore and develop readiness for such a project in KES. Following an approach to the Equality Authority, KES became one of the first educational bodies to be approved for an equality audit and review. This was undertaken through the Employment Equality Review and Action Plan Scheme funded by the Equality for Women Measure of the National Development Plan 2000–2006. Polaris Human Resources, a Dublin-based firm, was contracted to conduct the audit and to prepare an action plan. Building on the existing arrangements an equality review group was established to advise on the management of the project. The research was carried out between

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<sup>11</sup> See Equality Authority (2007), *Annual Report 2006*, Dublin: Equality Authority, p. 80, for details of the scheme.

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January and December 2004, and the report and action plan were published in April 2005. As part of the project, a review of the implementation process took place in December 2006, and a further review is planned as agreed between KES and Polaris, at the request of KES.

## **Methodology**

The methodology used for the review had been developed for the programme by the Equality Authority, utilised in a number of varied public and private sector employments and consisted of three basic processes: a quantitative survey conducted by questionnaire; a qualitative survey conducted via focus groups; and an extensive desk survey of human resource policies and practices.

- The questionnaire was issued to all staff to elicit information in respect of their position within the organisation, some personal details, their experiences in relation to equality in the employ of KES (including work–life balance and the managing of diversity) and their attitudes and perceptions in respect of equality in employment issues. The response rate for the questionnaire was 29 per cent, which, in the view of Polaris, compared well with other surveys conducted by them.
- Two focus groups were organised for teacher groups, two for trade unions, and one each for management grades, women, men, clerical staff, maintenance staff, those working through the Irish language and a gay/lesbian group for which there were no takers.
- The desk survey looked at: recruitment and selection and promotion files over a five-year period; training and development arrangements; working conditions policies and practices (such as flexitime, work-life balance provisions, collective bargaining procedures); compensation; and the management of equality and diversity.

## **Findings**

In general, the audit did not reveal any discriminatory practices across the nine grounds. And, surprisingly for us, the percentage of questionnaire respondents who indicated they had experienced some form of bullying and harassment while working for KES was 3 per cent – much lower than the national average reported as 12.6 per cent in 2001.<sup>12</sup>

However, the audit found that:

- The ‘equality agenda’ is not actively managed.
- There is a bias towards males in the upper echelons of management.
- There is not a gender balance in interview boards.
- Practices in relation to promotion need to be reviewed.
- There is little confidence in the selection procedures for promotion.
- Terms of employment for adult education tutors need to be reviewed.
- Training and development structures need to be reviewed.
- The IVEA should be encouraged to provide a range of supports to develop the equality agenda within the sector.

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<sup>12</sup> National Taskforce on the Prevention of Workplace Bullying (2001), *Report*, Dublin: Government Publications.

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- Some human resources policies and procedures/circulars issued by the Department of Education and Science (DES) need to be reviewed.
  - Women are not progressing to senior educational posts.
  - Pay indicators are more favourable for men than for women.
  - The growing equality agenda is impacting on the current resources in the personnel department.

Recommendations were made under the following four key headings:

*1. General equality issues.*

- Establish an equality action team.
- Assign responsibility for equality issues to a specific person to manage the agenda from day to day.
- Provide gender balance in key governance fora – committee and sub-committees.
- Examine the roles of the DES and IVEA in equality promotion.

*2. Recruitment, selection and promotion.*

- Introduce gender balance into interview boards.
- Review selection and promotion procedures.
- Review the 'seniority marking scheme'.<sup>13</sup>
- Provide training for interview boards.
- Report annually on appointment and promotion selections.

*3. Training and career development.*

- Develop a training strategy and an annual training plan.
- Clearly identify career development budgets.
- Provide induction and mentoring for all new staff.

*4. Workplace conditions.*

- Ensure workplace inclusion.
- Improve workplace communications.
- Promote partnership arrangements.
- Ensure access to buildings.
- Address gender pay ratios.

### **So how have we been getting on?**

Well, we have the Equality Action Team in action; an Equality Officer was appointed from early 2007 using resources from all KES programmes to facilitate a new post. Under each of the main recommendation headings, significant progress has been made. The new KES committee appointed under the revised provisions of the 2001 Vocational Education (Amendment) Act has a better gender balance and has facilitated improved balance on sub-committees.

By providing briefings to colleague VEC CEOs and Education Officers on our experience with the audit, and by the participation of the KES Equality Officer

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<sup>13</sup> Under the provisions of DES Circular 43/00, which dictates the terms for the allocation of marks at VEC teacher promotion competitions, 30 per cent of marks are allocated on the basis of seniority of service in the employment.



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at the IVEA, we succeeded in raising the profile of equality issues somewhat in the sector. Our Equality Officer was centrally involved in the development of a sectoral equality proofing instrument for use by all VECs in a joint IVEA and Equality Authority initiative, which was launched at the IVEA's 2007 congress.

We have begun the move to competency-based selection at interviews and have started the policy development and training programmes to support that change. However, despite our efforts to raise the question of the indirectly discriminatory effects of the seniority provision in promotion selection, we have been unable to effect any change in this matter to date.

Much work has been done to implement the workplace conditions recommendations – insofar as they were within our levels of discretion. However, we have not done as well as we would have hoped in terms of training and career development and internal communications. Reflecting on our relative successes and underachievements on the review recommendations to date, the critical factor is the distinction between those matters over which we have discretion or control, and those matters on which we are critically dependent on action by other agents.

For VECs, much of our employer-related functioning is governed by national public service and education service-wide agreements. Change in procedures and practices is frequently not an option at the level of the individual employer. This is particularly true in the area of recruitment and promotion and in matters relating to remuneration. So we have been unsuccessful to date in addressing the indirect discrimination that has been identified in the operation of the current criteria for promotion assessment, which allocates 30 per cent of selection marks on the basis of relative seniority of the candidates.

Similarly, the area of career development in the education sector is one with a myriad of players – DES, various curriculum support services, school development planning initiative, school leadership development programme, NCCA, education centres etc. – with little steering capacity available to the individual employer/VEC. However, we are not totally without some discretion in this area and we must acknowledge that we could have organised our internal training programmes more effectively in support of the action plan. A similar acknowledgement is warranted when it comes to the 'press of business' that deflects energy and attention away from the important to the urgent. For example, our Equality Officer must provide support to the personnel department within which she operates when it experiences workload crises, which has happened frequently in the period since the publication of the action plan.

One of the biggest points of pressure for VECs over the past two years was the requirement to prepare the first of the five-year education plans. The Education Plan 2006–2010 took a great deal of time and attention in 2005 and 2006. On the positive side it allowed for the theme of equality to be placed centrally in the organisational planning of KES and provided for the actions required by the equality review to be reiterated in the larger, more comprehensive education plan. But it also diverted attention from the implementation of the equality action plan.

Just as well we had already commenced the equal status review process!

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## Equal Status Review

The idea of looking at KES schools and centres from the point of view of equality issues in the delivery of services came up as an idea in our discussions on the equality review and action plan scheme. KES is an employer, but our primary business is education. Our concerns and our aspirations for KES in the area of equality could not reasonably be confined to the employment role of the organisation. An equal status review is an audit of the level of equal opportunity in the provision of a service and an examination of the policies, practices and procedures in the organisation to establish if they are conducive to the promotion of equality.<sup>14</sup>

The aims of the Equal Status Acts 2000 to 2004 are to:

- Promote equality of opportunity.
- Prohibit discrimination on nine specific grounds.
- Prohibit harassment on the discriminatory grounds and sexual harassment.
- Require reasonable accommodation of people with disabilities.
- Allow for positive action.

The Equal Status Acts specify four areas in which a school or centre for education must not discriminate:

- The admission of a student, including the terms or conditions of the admission of a student.
- The access of a student to a course, facility or benefit provided by the school.
- Any other term or condition of participation in the school.
- The expulsion of a student or any other sanction.

The Equality Authority was keen to develop a methodology and a set of instruments to be used in equal status review processes in education settings. So, the Equality Authority supported KES to undertake an equal status review in two schools and one adult education centre. A KES steering group representative of KES management, staff, students and parents managed the project. The contract for the work was awarded to the International Institute for Educational Leadership at the University of Lincoln, England. The contract for the first equal status review in an education setting took place in KES in the 2005/6 academic year.

## Methodology

Data was collected by staff questionnaires (with a 55 per cent return rate), by individual interview with each principal/centre manager, by telephone interviews with twenty parents, and by documentary search at KES head office and at each school/centre. Seven focus group interviews were conducted with sixty-eight students at the schools, divided equally between 14–15 year olds and 16–18 year olds, with a balanced gender mix; one focus group took place through the medium of Irish.<sup>15</sup> Six focus groups with twenty-five adult learners

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<sup>14</sup> See Equality Authority (2007), *Annual Report 2006*, Dublin: Equality Authority, p. 84, for a note on equal status review and the KES project.

<sup>15</sup> One of the two schools served a Gaeltacht area and operated an Aonad Lán Gaeilge as part of the school provision.

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took place at the adult education centre. Focus group processes for both young people and adults included oral and written elements, and were preceded by careful explanation of the ethical protocols underpinning both.

## **Findings**

The project has issued four reports. One for the two schools and one for the adult education centre relating specifically to their own data. A third, by way of a composite report to KES, provides an analysis based on a synthesis of the three pilot studies and presents the basis for a KES-wide action plan relating to its eight schools and all its adult education provision. The final report was specifically for the Equality Authority and focuses on the process of undertaking the equal status reviews, developing the instruments and the learning that occurred. This report is designed to enable the Equality Authority to apply this learning in supporting or conducting equal status reviews in other educational institutions.

I propose here to give you some summary insights into the findings of the study as presented in the composite report to KES. The organisational framework for the findings is that of the nine discrimination grounds.<sup>16</sup>

### *1. Gender*

- Staff varied in their knowledge and understanding of what policy exists in relation to gender equality.
- Overall, most students did not see their subject choices as hampered strongly by gender issues. But this was not a unanimous view. For example, it was considered by several female focus group participants in one school that the emphasis upon sports activities was at the expense of arts subjects, which might differentially affect young women.
- Complexities are recognised, in particular, those which relate to perceptions on the differential attention given to young men because of their misbehaviour, the effects on young men's learning and upon young women's learning, and differences in disciplinary treatment or expectations of young women's behaviour.

### *2. Family status and marital status*

- Neither young people nor staff viewed family or marital status as an equality issue, the assumption being that young people would not have family or marital responsibilities.
- There was majority agreement among staff and students that having family responsibilities was a barrier to accessing adult education courses.

### *3. Sexual orientation*

- Limited published research in Ireland reveals isolation, loneliness and depression among students whose sexual orientations are seen as different from the majority or who feel that their sexual identity is outside the 'norm'.
- Curriculum 'silence' around the ground of sexual orientation was noted by young people.

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<sup>16</sup> The material that follows draws on the composite report and substantially on a presentation made by the project leader, Professor Marlene Morrison of the University of Lincoln, International Institute for Education Leadership, to KES staff on 18 October 2006.

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- Both staff and students in schools are aware of a culture of homophobic name-calling and bullying.
  - In terms of the evidence, it seems beyond question that young people who are gay are being educated in a school environment that is likely to seriously undermine their self-esteem and so to be destructive of their learning.

#### 4. *Religion*

- In theory, the schools involved in this pilot are described as multi-denominational; however, in practice, both in the past and present, the religious ethos is predominantly Roman Catholic. For most young people, the ground was outside their interest or experience.

#### 5. *Age*

- In the adult education centre, the ground of age was linked, directly and indirectly, to the grounds of family status and marital status and to issues of transport, rural isolation, and course awareness. These, in turn, related to weaknesses in proactive marketing for different age groups.

#### 6. *Disability*

- Whilst teachers may show respect and care for students with disabilities, there is concern about teachers' limited understanding and training in relation to meeting the needs of students with disabilities.
- The majority view from the schools was that students with disabilities did not experience discrimination. Concerns focused upon the barriers caused by inadequate physical access and facilities.

#### 7. *Race*

- As for gender, an anti-racist curriculum that celebrates diversity as a core aspect of civic values depends hugely for its success on the training, continuing professional development and commitment of schools, principals, teachers and their respective managers and local authorities.
- Young people in focus groups considered that teachers were careful not to offend, but were not proactive in helping students integrate into school.

#### 8. *Travellers*

- Overall, attitudes among young people towards the Traveller community are extremely negative; the degree of negative stereotyping was more pronounced in the school that had neither Traveller students nor past experience of them.
- The widespread acknowledgement of stereotyping and prejudice against the Traveller community suggests that in the absence of strategic and operational policies and processes to counteract them, both direct and indirect discrimination will occur on this ground.

### **Achieving Equality in KES**

The strength of the statements in respect of the sexual orientation ground:

In terms of the evidence, it seems beyond question that young people who are gay are being educated in a school environment which is likely

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to seriously undermine their self-esteem and so to be destructive of their learning.

and in respect of the Traveller ground:

... in the absence of strategic and operational policies and processes to counteract them, both direct and indirect discrimination will occur on this ground.

are an immediate source of concern and require attention. However, the directions in respect of an action plan warn that:

- Change will be brought about by a long-term, determined and persistent educational strategy in which equity is embedded as a central facet.
- Superficial and short-term measures are likely to achieve nothing of significance.
- A *Diversity Plus* model, focused on the needs of groups as well as individuals, is crucial.

Overall, the review suggests that four key challenges exist for educational institutions:

1. The need to successfully incorporate equal status as an issue of equality and inclusion in terms of access, participation and outcomes for students.
2. To encourage staff, students and relevant partners to understand, acknowledge and value equality and diversity.
3. That the promotion of equality and a recognition of diversity is mirrored through the institution's ethos and governance, its curricula (formal and informal), pedagogies and relationship to its communities.
4. That the grounds of age, marital status and family status may have a specific, though not exclusive, importance in adult, further and higher education settings.

In combination, the above challenges signify cultural as well as organisational shifts in thinking, planning, management and action that will necessitate, over the longer term, pro- rather than re-activity to statutory developments, on the part of educational organisations.

### **Structural Change**

The report states that there is a reasonable amount of evidence in the study that leaders and managers consistently assess the degree of equity more positively than others in the organisation. Many genuinely believe that neither they nor all/most of the staff would ever discriminate and that therefore equality is a reality. The profound impact of structure is underestimated. A number of structural changes are therefore suggested:

- A post in the organisation with responsibility for equality.
- Explicit policy statements that relate to each of the nine grounds.
- The equality proofing of all operational procedures for schools and centres.

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## **Sensitive Issues**

Some of the nine grounds present particularly intransigent challenges in changing attitudes. The audit suggests that such issues are currently not tackled directly in schools. For example, while the law states that people should not be disadvantaged because of their sexual orientation, the widespread culture of related mockery and abuse is allowed to go largely unchallenged. The report suggests:

... discussion about the relationship of equity and the nine grounds needs to become explicit and commitment built. Whatever the position individuals may hold, that must not translate into structures, policies or actions which lead to inequity on any of the nine grounds.

## **Teaching and Learning**

Recommendations include:

- The curriculum of schools should be reviewed to ensure that education in relation to each of the nine grounds is embedded in the curriculum.
- KES needs to engage with (and stimulate) a debate on the meaning of inclusiveness for its schools under present circumstances.
- For the majority of staff, equal status rarely features as part of staff meetings.
- For young people, the key issue was about teachers being seen, at best, as a weak force to counter the school culture, and sometimes as indifferent.

## **Priorities for Schools**

Schools should:

- Take steps to avoid gender disadvantage in classroom interaction.
- Examine the application of discipline to students of both genders.
- Eliminate the use of homophobic terms.
- Combat stereotyping and prejudice against Travellers.
- Assess the links between curricular pathways and student abilities and preferences.
- Review the match between curriculum and students of different religious or ethnic backgrounds.
- Ensure supports for young people with family responsibilities.
- Monitor the integration of young people with learning difficulties.

In responding to these priorities, we have come to realise the need for the development of an overall KES Policy on Equality and Inclusion in our schools and to provide appropriate and ongoing training for school management, teachers and all staff. We recognise the need to provide incentives for schools to develop inclusive methods and an awards structure for the most inclusive school. In recent months the requirements for ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) in both schools and centres is an aspect of diversity that we have had to address with a particular set of interventions.

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## Priorities for Adult Education Centres

Centres should:

- Develop strategies for training and professional development in inclusion strategies for staff.
- Assist staff to deal with perceptions of discrimination.
- Examine the physical structures of the centre for barriers or deterrents.
- Review co-operation with other organisations to overcome indirect discrimination.
- Review marketing, timing and type of course in adult education against the nine grounds.
- Investigate the prospects for on-site childcare.
- Identify responsibility for adult learners with disabilities and learning difficulties.

In responding to these priorities we have come to recognise the need for us to build more strategic partnership with others such as Institute of Technology Tralee and FÁS to ensure progression and equality of outcomes for all.

### Conclusion: Three Key Principles

This review process has left us with considerable challenges. But we now understand more clearly what we once felt vaguely. We can restart and restructure the conversation on the basis of the studies that were carried out within our organisation and the recommendations presented to us. But whether we are dealing with equality issues in the frame of our role as an employer, or in our wider role as a provider of education services, the following three principles, articulated in the equal status review report, seem to me to be wise counsel:

- Superficial and short-term measures are likely to achieve nothing of significance.
- Change will be brought about by a long-term, determined and persistent educational strategy in which equality is embedded as a central facet.
- A *Diversity Plus* model focused on the needs of groups as well as individuals is crucial.

The notion of *Diversity Plus* is articulated in terms that are very challenging in the settings in which we work. That is the journey to which we are committed.

# Notes

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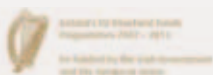




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