A RESPONSE TO THE GREEN PAPER

ON ADULT EDUCATION

IN AN ERA OF LIFELONG LEARNING

National Women's Council of Ireland

July 1999

INTRODUCTION & SUMMARY

"Adult Education must embrace the collective dimensions of women's lives, that is, their local setting, social position, economic status, and interrupted education cycles".

(A Study of Feminist Education as an Empowerment Strategy for Community Based Women's Groups in Ireland ~ WERRC 1999)

The National Women's Council of Ireland welcomes the publication of the Green Paper on Adult Education in an Era of Lifelong Learning and the opportunity to participate in the debate. This is the first time that adult education and community education has received this level of recognition. As such, it marks a new beginning for the adult and community education sectors which, whatever its achievements, has been poorly resourced and respected heretofore.

One of the most pleasing aspects of the Green Paper is the way in which it acknowledges the contribution and excellence of aspects of the current adult education and community education provision, particularly the contribution made by women in the community and voluntary sector. Women and women's groups have had a long pioneering affiliation with the development of these areas of education provision. Through this Green Paper and its further development, the 'inferior status' of adult education and community education may finally be remedied.

However, it is the view from the outset that women have received scant attention in the Green Paper. Though some very relevant points regarding gender inequality and women's contribution are highlighted throughout the Paper, it is the view of the NWCI that the barriers to women's participation, their needs, their contribution in the development of models of adult and community education are not fully recognised nor utilised.

This response deals with significant aspects of adult and community education in general and the role of women in particular in these areas. It outlines some of the ways in which the document both fails to identify issues related to gender and to address the way in which various policies and initiatives impact differently on women. This response presents a summation of the views of the NWCI in relation to the key issues addressed in the Green Paper. The recommendations in this response is testimony to the quality of the views and reflective practice engaged in by those women most intimately connected with adult and community education on a daily basis.

The role of women in adult and community education has been enhanced in recent years through support programmes like EMPLOYMENT NOW and the Women's

Education Initiative. For this enhancement to effectively contribute to education and training policy it must be recognised, alongside the 'traditional' education and training systems, and built into strategies for adult and community education. By including women, the opportunities for adult and community education strategies are multiplied and hence the possibilities for sustaining the viability of these evolving sectors.

Women's contribution first has to be counted, whether it is valuing their role as adult and community educators or by gender-specific analysis of participation in education and training. There are significant gaps in information collection that need to be filled to enable this process of counting to fully assess women's position. Once women are counted, interventions can be planned which are targeted appropriately and effectively.

Women's participation in the process is of key importance, as they are the one's most in touch with women's needs. This is particularly true where the necessary gender-specific data is limited, making it particularly difficult to assess women's situation and potential contribution.

The Green Paper represents a catch-all vision for the future of Adult and Community Education for this country. It assumes that the implementation of the vision will continue to be best shaped by the professionals already involved and in control of education. It ignores the contribution already made to models of best practice in community-based NOW projects and other ESF EMPLOYMENT projects, which has been the one avenue for innovation that has been open to Adult and Community Education.

The NWCI and NOW believe that the White Paper must take on the recommendations contained in this submission . The purpose of making this submission and engaging in the debate is to ensure that women both as educators and learners are represented and heard in the development of the Adult and Community Education policy.

We hope that this submission is the first step in establishing an ongoing dialogue between NWCI and the Department of Education and Science in order to ensure that we can all rise to the challenges that face us.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The aspirations for change set out in the Green Paper must be translated into concrete proposals in the White Paper with clear time-frames and budgets;

2. a) An analysis of women's and men's differing educational needs and ways of learning must be included in the White Paper;

    b) The findings of these analyses are utilised in designing a gender-proofed White Paper;

3. Resources and mechanisms are put in place that enable women's education and community groups to become eligible for core funding for a period of five years at a time, enabling them to realistically develop and consolidate valuable work in adult and community education;

4. a) Recognition is given to the particular needs of women in situation of educational disadvantage, and specific measures and resources are created to enable them to participate in quality, flexible, education and training.   In particular, we recommend the mainstreaming of :

    ⇒ relevant NOW-funded projects and models derived from the NOW
        experience (cross-departmental responsibility);

    ⇒ the Women's Education Initiative (within the Further Education Section of

    the Department of Education);

    b) Furthermore, the White Paper must specifically identify and address the key needs of women facing multiple disadvantage, such as Traveller women, women with disabilities, refugees and asylum-seekers, rural women, thus remedying their absence from the Green Paper;

5. Women must be made visible in the White Paper, both as learners and educators, through the inclusion of:

    ⇒ gender disaggregated data;
    ⇒ specific measures that will enhance women's access and
        participation in quality education and training;
    ⇒ mechanisms to ensure that women in adult and community
        education will have their voices heard in future developments;

6. The White Paper must view adult and community education as part of an holistic approach to tackling poverty and disadvantage, and be careful not to develop unrealistic expectations on education, particularly "second chance" education, as a means of overcoming poverty and exclusion on its own;

7. Revision of the primary context of the White Paper is necessary to value balanced social and economic development: education is a key social, cultural, political and personal activity, and it's value as such outweighs its value as a means to enhance our employment capacity as a nation;

8. Adult and community education must be explicitly recognised as a medium for transmitting values, and that all new policy and practice in this area must be underpinned by an active commitment to challenging inequalities, including gender inequality;

9. A two-pronged approach must be adopted to improving both women's access to education and training and the quality of the provision. Priority needs include:

   ⇒ childcare/ eldercare supports;
   ⇒ flexibility of courses in timing and location;
   ⇒ ending of Live Register constraints on eligibility;
   ⇒ financing for courses;
   ⇒ women-centred learning approaches;
   ⇒ infrastructure, including capital grants for community-based women's groups;

10. The White Paper must give parity of esteem to adult education and community education, and recognise them as distinct models of education;

11. Membership of the proposed new local and national structures, Local Adult Learning Boards and the National Adult Learning Council, should have:

   ⇒ 50% gender balance;

   ⇒ 50% adult learner;

12. The continuing process of consultation towards the White Paper must be committed to creating a meaningful dialogue between the Department and interest groups.

   In particular, women learners and educators working with women's groups must be resourced to participate. The first test of this will be the Adult Education Forum in September 1999: Most women's groups and community groups will not be able to participate without support for their expenses,

such as childcare and transport. If this is not made available by the Department, we will have to conclude that there is no commitment to a participative process of consultation.

The NWCI response is presented in the context of a number of central concerns. We have prioritised a number of issues which are vital in terms of the effective development of adult and community education, and they are in the text in the following order:

1. Gender

2. Definition and key concepts

3. Adult Education and Training Provision

4. Finance and Funding

5. Resources/Supports

6. Community Education

7. Accreditation

8. Information, Guidance and Counselling

9. Adult and Community Education in Rural Areas

10. Structures and Consultation

1. GENDER

Women's Contribution to Adult and Community Education

Mainstream statutory education, training and labour market programmes for a variety of reasons effectively exclude women and/or fail to meet their needs. In response, women have established their own groups, developed and delivered information, support, childcare/eldercare, advice and guidance, education and training programmes to both urban and rural women who otherwise would have no access to such assistance. Women have established practices and policy at local level to provide accessible, relevant and appropriate information, support, training and education experiences, and have devised educational policy through consultation with their client base.

Voluntary workers for the most part run women's groups. Such groups are dependent on their own resources and raising their own funds. Within the general group of women there are also specific groups of women who experience specific forms of disadvantaged, such as violence and abuse, poverty and low income. Furthermore, women are often involved in establishing education provision not just for other women but for young people, the long–term unemployed, older people, parents, Travellers and other groups.

Women's Needs

Women's involvement in education and training is a distinct and separate sector within the community and voluntary sector. The women's sector's alternative models of education and their distinct methodologies have remained **unsupported, under recognised, under represented and under resourced.**

At a grassroots level women individually and collectively deal with issues pertaining to women and provide services relevant and appropriate to women's needs and circumstances. Despite their success, women still have a range of specific needs and still experience inequality and disadvantage regarding education and training including:

- limited access to education and training,

- lack of progression routes from training and education,

- lack of appropriate forms of training delivery,

- unrecognised needs which women have in relation to family responsibilities, poverty and social exclusion

The Green Paper on Adult Education fails to acknowledge, much less address, the differences which women and men experience in terms of their participation or experience of adult education or community education. The failure to address the issue of gender runs throughout the whole document and ensures that many issues raised are, at the very least, incomplete. Indeed the issues pertaining to other groups such as Travellers, people with disability, the older person are also inadequately dealt with. Consequently the recommendations contained in the

Green Paper are often inadequate and in many instances and fail to address the key issues.

Examples of a Lack of Gender Impact Analysis:

- Statistics for unemployment and education qualifications are provided but no statistics around gender unemployment patterns are provided or discussed.

- Page 28 addresses school performance and parental educational attainment. The tabular information refers to the critical importance of mothers in terms of their children's participation in education and school performance. Therefore, they should be invested in as the key to breaking the "intergenerational cycle of disadvantage" – but, this statement indicates not in their own right but in their roles as mothers.

- The characteristics of multiple deprivation are listed (p20/21) but no reference is made to women's unemployment rates nor any reference to the fact that women's dependency on social welfare is disproportional to men; nor any reference to the fact that these two issues are related.

- Demographic trends are examined later in Chapter 1 and international comparisons are made – but there is no breakdown by gender.

- Adult participation is examined in which Ireland's weak performance in contrast with other countries is outlined. Again there is no gender analysis.

RECOMMENDATIONS

☒ In promoting equality of opportunity, education and training policies, mainstream adult and community education must be tailored to women's specific needs and circumstances if they are to be accessible to and relevant to women. This is what women's groups so successfully do and why women's groups have so much to offer policy development. It is necessary that policy development which seeks to address educational disadvantage take into account women's needs and achievements.

☒ The support needs of women and women's groups (e.g. funding) need to be met if they are to continue their significant contribution and crucial role in the design and delivery of adult and community education.

☒ The Forthcoming White Paper must pay particular attention to women's voice in this current debate.

☒ The White paper must be gender proofed. The Second Commission on the Status of Women, First Statement (p17) recommended that "every memorandum for

government should set out the probable impact on women of the proposed policy change". The Government adopted this in 1993.

Useful guidelines for gender-proofing are being drawn up by the Gender Proofing Working Group, presently meeting unde rthe Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, and should be applied to the White Paper;

☒ Women must be fairly represented in the monitoring arrangements with respect to the implementation of the White Paper.

Women and Poverty

In the introduction to the Green Paper a case is presented for a national policy in relation to adult education. Four main reasons underpin this policy, including a focus on addressing poverty and disadvantage, and promoting equality, competitiveness and employment. However, in citing the importance of adult education in tackling poverty and social exclusion no mention is made of the different experiences which men and women have of poverty and which have been documented elsewhere.   No mention is made of the fact that it is women who experience poverty to a greater degree, face increasing risks of poverty and are over-represented in the poorest sections of society in Ireland[1]. In addressing the issue of equality we might have expected a mention of gender, yet it does not feature; the serious problem of adult literacy is referred to but no mention is made of gender differences, if any, in relation to this issue. No mention of growing class differentials is apparent anywhere in the Green Paper. This is a serious omission considering such studies as that of Kathleen Lynch and Claire O'Riordan on "Inequality in Higher Education: A Study of Class Barriers" which shows that there "are a number of ways in which economic, cultural and educational institutions interact to promote inequality through a series of procedures and processes in families, communities, schools and colleges" (British Journal of Sociology of Education, 1998).

RECOMMENDATION

☒ There is a need to develop policy and practice to address the disadvantage, inequality, social exclusion and poverty experienced by women as a group in Irish society. The forthcoming White Paper must take true cognisance and provide analysis of gender and class barriers which exist in the current system so as not to provide "more of the same" within the evolving adult and community education system.

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[1] See publication: "Women and Poverty in Ireland", (1999) Combat Poverty Agency

National Women's Council of Ireland
June 1999

2. DEFINITION AND KEY CONCEPTS

Defining Adult Education

The way in which adults are encouraged to learn and are assisted in that learning is the single most significant ingredient of adult education. Adult education must start with the learner.

One of the most surprising and questionable aspects of the Green Paper is its definition of adult education. The authors have continued with a definition of adult education provided in 1984 by the Report of the Kenny Commission on Adult Education. The definition describes provision as opposed to offering any new theoretical assessment of adult education.

Certainly, the provision of a definition of adult education is a difficult task, as many factors must be taken into account. Adult education is constantly evolving and is relative to its cultural and philosophical context, the organisation and setting for delivery, the educational objectives and content, the nature of the learning group and the methodology of teaching and communication.

Adult education is almost always a totally voluntary activity and is undertaken either for personal development or skills enhancement or both. For instance, women returning to education come with three agendas which have been identified by Dr. Kathleen Lynch, Co-ordinator of the Equality Studies Centre, UCD. The three types are as follows:

1. Parent Educators: where women want to improve literary and other skills to assist children's education;

2. Self Identity: where women return to education to establish an identity of their own;

3. As a means of returning to or establishing a career.

RECOMMENDATION

☒ The definition of adult education as stated in the Green Paper is very limited and demands more consideration before the publication of the White Paper.

The Green Paper sets out a number of key concepts, which it sees as underpinning an approach to adult and community education which include:

"International investment, lifelong learning, participatory democracy, community development in disadvantaged areas, civil society, Globalisation and technological change, poverty and educational disadvantage, demographic trends, international comparisons and reskilling the workforce"(p17-34).

The NWCI would like to comment on a number of the above areas:

International Investment

The first concept presented is that of international investment. This is supplemented with a direct quote from the 1995 European Commission's White Paper on Education and training "Towards a Learning Society". One focus of the European White Paper is the need to develop skills and economic productivity. The NWCI recognises the importance of this but believes that a starting point for any discussion of adult education and community education should be focused on the personal needs of the individual.

Throughout the Green Paper there is an emphasis on the role of adult and community education in economic development. In fact is it perhaps true to say that this new-found commitment to adult and community education is due to Ireland's positive economic change. The Green Paper does credit adult and community education with creating a more **"civilised society by promoting culture, identity and well being and by strengthening individual, families and communities"(p16)**. However while the role of adult and community education in economic development is important there is a bias towards education for employment in the Green Paper. The fact that priority has been given to the enhancement of economic growth and competitiveness reflects a utilitarian approach to adult education.

RECOMMENDATION

☒ The White Paper must reflect less of an economic bias and more of a learner-centred approach to adult and community education.

Lifelong Learning

The definition of lifelong learning in the Green Paper is comprehensive and is welcomed. However, it is interesting to note that the Green Paper rarely links or mentions lifelong learning beyond it initial discussion on page 19.

RECOMMENDATION

☒ The shifting of the adult education debate into the lifelong learning framework has many implications which need to be explored in the White Paper.

For example:

- Can lifelong learning overcome educational inequalities e.g. gender, disability and class?

- What forms of access and progression can best facilitate the participation of women in a lifelong learning framework?

- How is it to be ensured that groups experiencing disadvantage e.g. women, people with disabilities etc. are included in all forms of lifelong learning opportunities?

- What mechanisms to promote participation in lifelong learning are needed to overcome disadvantage?

- What are the implications for resources, including funding?

- How can individuals and groups successful engage in lifelong learning?

- How can we ensure that the initial system of education becomes as basis for lifelong learning?

Participatory Democracy

The Green Paper refers to social inclusion as requiring **"a capacity to make, or at least influence, decisions that impact on one's current and future lifestyle" (p20).** Women are still underrepresented in decision making fora. This low representation is reflected in the inadequacy of many practices and policies in relation the adult and community education. Another effect of this is the invisibility of women's contribution to policy through research studies, reports and development programmes at regional, national and EU level. This argues for special attention to be given for the inclusion of women by policy makers, statutory agencies, education institutions and training agencies.

RECOMMENDATION

☒ Women's experiences must be heard. Women's representation and consultation issues must be addressed in the White Paper **(see 10. Structures).**

Community Development in Disadvantaged areas

In the context of a discussion of the growth of community organisations (p21) it is interesting to note that all examples cited are statutory ones e.g. the Community Development Projects, community policing initiatives, home/school/community liaison etc. Indeed the initiatives listed throughout the Green Paper are those directly linked to Government Departments. This indicates a lack of knowledge about the level and extent of adult and community education activity taking place on the ground. For example 104 NOW pilot/research projects since 1992 have developed education and training models which have sign-posted changes that need to occur and worked out viable mechanisms to achieve that change. Yet for the most part the mainstream agencies, service providers, educational institutions and government department have been remiss in their responsibility in examining these models.

Women's groups have also raised key policy issues for the formal educational institutions but have they being acted upon? Certainly there is a dearth of research amongst the non-formal sector and the women's sector. However the delivery and the outcomes of the projects and programmes such as those developed under the EMPLOYMENT Initiative have themselves validated the process. The Green Paper provides a reference to women's groups and their contribution to community education activity (p21/22). However, it is stated that there is little formal research available on these groups although they have been self evidently successful. This raises a number of questions for instance: why has so little research been carried out into such initiatives, which are recognised as being successful? Why has the experiences gained by these groups not being drawn upon in this Green Paper and other mainstream policy development? Where do the resources for formal research come from? Often much community education, community based and adult education activity involving women comes from their own resources through fundraising or once off small grant funding. While invaluable at the early stages of a women's groups existence, it is inadequate as a group develops to more complex levels of work/activity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

⌘ This response calls upon the Department of Education and Science to collate existing research, and commission additional research, into education provision in the non formal sector, in order to recognise and utilise existing expertise in the sector to the full.

⌘ The experiences gained by women's groups and programmes like EMPLOYMENT NOW must be drawn upon in the White Paper and other mainstream policy development.

Poverty and Educational Disadvantage:

It is notable that the Green Paper on Adult Education does not address poverty and educational disadvantage in a reflective way. It focuses on current provision for those who are disadvantaged, but does not reflect on the achievement of current strategies that have been developed by women historically and currently to deal with this issue.

With regard to educational disadvantage and unemployment no gender analysis is provided within the Green Paper. In a discussion on poverty in the context of NAPS no analysis or information is given about women's experience of poverty – the 'feminisation of poverty' referred to in countless reports and documents.

Combat Poverty Agency's new publication, Women and Poverty in Ireland highlights that gender is a critical factor in the discussion of poverty: it is women who experience poverty to a greater degree, face increasing risks of poverty and are over-represented in the poorest sections of society. Key findings in the report show that 24% of female-headed household experience poverty in comparison to 17% of male-headed households. There is a sharp rise in the risk of poverty facing female-headed households, whereas the risk of poverty for couple- and male-

headed households has remained stable since 1987. Lone parents, female-headed households headed by women working in the home, women living alone and older women are facing an increased risk of poverty. The presence of children makes a significant impact on the increasing poverty of families.

When the Green Paper quotes recent EUROSTAT data, no breakdown or analysis of figures occurs either on a gender bases, class, age, people with disabilities etc. Again, a disturbing aspect of this section of the Green Paper is the emphasis between the education system and the economy. Though the links between early school leaving, lack of educational qualifications, unemployment and poverty are valid, education itself alone cannot overcome unemployment or poverty without a support environment constructed by the State e.g. access to information, improved housing etc. The causes of poverty are not down to individual characteristics but down to society's stratification and uneven distribution of resources and power. Therefore unrealistic expectations on education particularly "second chance", must be challenged and need considerably more reflection.

The NWCI welcomes the reference to the Employment National Action Plan for Ireland and that **"the case for a well targeted and well resourced education and training programme with long term unemployed is justified"**. However, no links are alluded to which suggest how policies will be developed to improve women's access to and participation in education and training. This is particularly a problem since many women looking for work go uncounted in official unemployment statistics.

RECOMMENDATIONS

☒ Unrealistic expectations on education, particularly "second chance" education, as a means of overcoming poverty and exclusion needs considerably more reflection in the White Paper in order to see adult and community education as only **part** of an holistic approach to tackling poverty and disadvantage. A review of the NAPS Strategy, "Sharing in Progress", in this context is crucial.

☒ reflection ongoing and action to link the National Anti-Poverty Strategy and the Employment National Action Plan with policies in the White Paper needs to take place.

☒ Innovative policies and practices needs to be clearly defined in the White Paper on how to improve women's (and other target groups) access to and participation in education and training.

The Women's Education Initiative (WEI)

The NWCI regard the WEI is absolutely key in developing a long-term, effective strategy for addressing women's educational disadvantage. The NWCI looks forward to the evaluation of the 13 projects piloted by groups involved in the WEI over the last two years, and the policy recommendations arising from them.

However, the present significance of the WEI as pilot programme must be transformed into future significance for a much larger number of women, coming from a broader range of types of disadvantage.

RECOMMENDATION

☒ The Women's Education Initiative must be mainstreamed after its completion at the end of 1999. This mainstreaming should happen in a number a ways, including the establishment of a long-term Programme (with it's own Budget line) to address women's educational disadvantage under the Further Education Section of the Department of Education.

Reskilling the workforce

The demographic changes in recent years imply that the "task of renewing the economy's human capital will increasingly fall on those already within the workforce rather than on new entrants to it"(p.32). What about women returners ? Women have been excluded from the workforce for a number of reasons e.g. absence of any childcare provision and discriminatory practices in training policies – i.e. marriage bar, Live Register requirements etc. Why should they be further discriminated against by favouring those already within the system, and ignoring the human capital kept outside?

Also the role of employers in an integrated approach with education and training institutions is briefly mentioned in relation to **"flexibility of provision in terms if timing, access routes, progression pathways, and modulation and flexible certification systems with mechanisms for accreditation of prior learning and work based experience"** (p33). What structures/incentives/systems will be put in place to accommodate this process? What linkage will take place between the policies put forward by the Expert Group on Future Skills and adult education strategies? Little reference is made to the role and necessary commitment of employers in future development of education and training programmes. Currently, for most women in the Labour Market and those wishing to enter it is a matter of women changing to fit the needs of employers rather than employers meeting the needs of women. No reference is made to the marginalisation of women whose participation in the paid workforce is already characterised by low pay, segregation into a narrow range of activities considered 'women's work', and into the lowest levels of skills and enterprise within those sectors. . For women in the workforce, the act of balancing work and family does not leave room to take on evening or weekend professional development programmes. Paid educational leave for those in the workforce is raised in the Green Paper. However, commitment and mechanisms on this issue are lacking and needs considerable reflection including all stakeholders to progress concrete implementation. There is also a question as to the advancement of the policies which were outlined in the White Paper on Human Resource Development and how the policy on Adult Education will link and complement these.

The Green Paper highlights the need to develop skills in the areas of Management, Technology, Computer Software, and electronics at technician level (p33-34). Can it be co-incidental that these are all areas in which women are significantly under-represented in the current workforce and educational system?

RECOMMENDATIONS

◻ **W**omen returners who have been engaged previously in unpaid domestic or caring work in the home must be given priority access to education, training and employment for the purposes of re-skilling and up-skilling. This is particularly important in recognising the value to society of their unpaid work in the home;

◻ The role of employers must be overtly demonstrated in the White Paper with clear mechanisms for engaging and monitoring employers responsibilities in relation to education, training and development

◻ Clear links with the White Paper on Human Resource Development must be demonstrated.

◻ An integrated strategy must be established to encourage and facilitate women to train for, enter and progress their careers in areas of employment where they are currently under represented, especially the emerging technological sectors.

3. ADULT EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROVISION

The Green Paper provides a description of provision divided into three phases: 1922–1969, 1969–1988 and Development since 1989. Phase one provides an interesting historical context. However, some very important points need to be made regarding this. The Green Paper refers to **" the contribution of a vibrant non governmental sector in the adult education field".** This needs further acknowledgement though its written history is limited.   Despite founding much adult education and community education and development initiatives in the State, this Paper does not refer in any great detail to the role of women, and even less provide an analysis of their contributions, rural and urban.

1969 – 1988 saw the publication of the Murphy Report – Adult Education in Ireland (1973) and the Report of the Kenny Commission 1984. No mention is made of whether either report examined participation rates by gender, people with disabilities, older people etc, and to the changes which have taken place over the last twenty years.   Within the non formal sector AONTAS and NALA were identified as playing **"a critical role in heightening the visibility and priority of literacy and Adult Education issues in Ireland".** The NWCI would endorse this view. However, other locally based and national organisations have been omitted, and no analysis however brief is explored.

Development since 1989 saw the introduction of VTOS and Back to Education Programme and changes in social welfare entitlements. FAS, VECs, Department of Social Welfare Community Development Programmes and the European Structural Fund programmes are listed. No analysis of the impact of these takes place whether it be success or failure. This chapter does identify community based **groups "as distinct from the more formalised, voluntary sector".** No analysis of models, success or failure developed is provided nor any inclination to examine the development brought about by these initiatives for extension, transfer or adjustment.

RECOMMENDATION

☒ **R**esearch, analysis and examination of programmes and models of good practice not linked directly to the Department of Education and Science needs to take place.

Live Register

No reference is made within the Green Paper on how the Live Register as an entry requirement impacts adversely on women's progression prospects into training and education. Though the Live Register does not accurately record women's unemployment and leads to an under representation of women in the overall unemployment figures, it remains a important criteria for access to many of the largest measures. Only women who have kept up their social insurance contributions through employment or by signing on for credits, or who qualify through a spousal swap arrangement, can qualify for, for example: some FAS training courses or for assistance with third level expenses from the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs Back to Education Initiative or VTOS. As a result many unemployed women can find themselves excluded from these. The Live Register is currently the subject of a Partnership 2000 Working Group under the

Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs – Women's Access to the Labour Market.   The group is expected to produce a draft report in July that will raise issues in relation to women's access to education and training.

RECOMMENDATIONS

☒ Provide coherent and consistent information and administrative procedures to encourage women to record their unemployment on the Live Register.

☒ That the Live Register requirement for mainstream education and training programmes needs is re-examined. Eligibility should be urgently extended to:

⇒ spouses of Live Register claimants;

⇒ women in low income households;

⇒ women returners.

☒ Close examination by the Department of Education and Science of the report of the Partnership 2000 Working Group Women's Access to the Labour Market.

Adult Literacy

The main thrust of the Green Paper is in directing investment towards addressing literacy and basic educational needs. This is a critical area in development of adult education and certainly addresses some of the critical issues in the sector. The NWCI welcomes the commitment in the Green Paper to providing a national adult literacy programme. The Green Papers focuses on the literacy problems in the context of the results of the OECD International Adult Literacy Survey conducted in 1997. The survey found that 25% of the Irish population (500,000 adults) were found to experience literacy difficulties. The emphasis in the green Paper is basically on training individuals for employability, and no attention is given to gender dimensions. Phrases such as "**high levels of literacy and numeracy are a prerequisite for participation in the modern knowledge based economy**" indicate this (p32). The paper goes on to say, "**literacy is also central to self image, self esteem and personal confidence**". This should in fact be the central focus of improving literacy levels nationally. The manner in which literacy is regarded has major implications for the type of literacy provision made available to tackle it. Tackling adult literacy needs a multi faceted approach – learner-centred, supportive, holistic, developing confidence and self-esteem.

The Green Paper points out that "the results of the survey clearly point to the need for a comprehensive adult education strategy which is effectively targeted at those in need and that Ireland lags significantly behind other countries in terms of literacy performance" (p30). It goes on to point out that low levels of literacy will have a marked impact on competitiveness (p32). While the NWCI recognises the fact that people need basic skills to enable them to participate in employment, nevertheless, to reiterate a previous point, it is a source of some concern that the emphasis in the Green Paper focuses on competitiveness. Adult literacy deserves and needs investment. However the resources channelled into it must not be at the expense of other areas of the educational system.

Reference is made to the scarcity of trained tutors, the absence of qualifications and an unstable career structure. Why is this so? Why has it persisted so long? Because the work is under-valued and the majority of teachers/tutors are women.

RECOMMENDATIONS

☒ **A** range of provision offered in adult literacy has to be developed to answer the range of needs presented by potential individual learners.

☒ There is a need for flexibility in the tuition time made available to adults

☒ There is a need to co-ordinate current education provision to eliminate the competitive, fragmented approach that presently exists. A integrated approach to literacy and adult basic education at local level needs to be improved. Adult literacy Organisers need to be working in partnership with other agencies in their area to co-ordinate, integrate, develop and promote the Adult Literacy Services.

☒ There is a need to focus on activity that is meaningful to the individual rather than the increase in the employability of the individual.

☒ It is vital that tutors/teachers are trained in facilitation techniques and that they have a broad understanding of and respect for adults' background and inhibitions.

☒ Securing women's participation as volunteers: Adult literacy tuition is for the most part provided by volunteers in the community – their experience and skills must not be lost through the 'professionalising' of the sector, but supported and invested in as part of the future.

Back to Education Initiative:

In discussing the Back to Education Initiative reference is made to the gaps that still remains to be addressed **"some problems and gaps do, however, still persist"** (p77). Reference is made to the exclusion of significant sectors, most notably women in the home and it is stated that this exclusion poses an ongoing challenge to the system. But no specific measures are proposed to tackle this challenge.

The Green Paper stated that the following groups will be given priority (p78):

* Those in the 15-24 age group who have only primary education

* Those in the 15-39 age group who have only junior certificate qualifications.

There is a category absent from these priority groups – women within the 35-55 age group. Reasons for this include: the cost of second level education up until the late 1960's, the marriage bar for those women working in the public service up until the late 1970's, limited career options beyond the 'traditional' female work and the 'normal' practice of women leaving school early in the 1960's and 1970's. Because of the restrictions placed by society on this particular cohort of women it is necessary to prioritise actions in order that they not experience more discrimination into the next century.

The Green Paper make recommendations regarding VTOS, Youthreach and PLC courses which include: offering courses in part time form, offering flexible modular blocks in a range of forms – morning, night time, weekends and summer courses (p79), giving priority access to unemployed with a Back to Education allowance, free access for long term unemployed, medical card holders and those with no qualifications, removal of barriers to participation for 18–20 year olds and that fees should be levied for other participants. While the NWCI welcomes the proposal of part time modular delivery there is strong concern around the unemployment criteria. As the Green Paper points out VTOS is **"a second chance education and training programme of one and two year full time courses for adults of 21 years and over who are at least six months unemployed'** (p78). The specific objective of VTOS is to enable long term unemployed people to make the transition to stable employment or to further education and training. However, as stated previously many women do not satisfy the unemployed criteria and are not eligible to participate on such courses. Also, pre development VTOS courses need to be considered and recognised. Such courses provide the opportunity for learners to clearly define their training needs, and to ensure that the training that is delivered is meeting these defined needs. This would enable the mainstream education and training providers to become aware of the specific types of training and education that best meets the needs of the learner before embarking on VTOS programmes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

⊠ Live Register as an entry requirement impacts adversely on women's prospects of entry onto VTOS, and must be changed.

⊠ Introduction of Pre VTOS courses.

⊠ Progression possibilities from VTOS need to be examined particularly to third level.

⊠ Backing up this much needed reform with realistic allocation of funding to provide better facilities and services such a counselling, childcare.

⊠ Leaving Certificate equivalents need to be put in place.

Community Employment

This particular area of training needs radical review. Career Guidance and counselling within the service is non existent. In addition there is a lack of progression paths ways for participants to training, education and work.

RECOMMENDATIONS

⊠ **W**omen need to have access to sufficient numbers of appropriate, quality mainstream education and training places;

⊠ **P**rogression routes from Community Education (and other Active Labour Market Programmes) to other training, education or employment options must be prioritised for development to meet the needs of women participants.

Part-time Adult Education and Community Education

In the early part of chapter 3, the authors make reference to the fact that most adult education is part time, but no examination or explanation of why this is so occurs. An examination of gender participation rates would help explain some of the reasons for this.

Part time adult education and community education are necessary to fit the personal and social needs of women, especially those with childcare and eldercare responsibilities.

Various schemes being provided by statutory bodies are examined. For example, VTOS. But no analysis is made of who are the participants or the conditions imposed e.g. lack of adequate childcare provision. A childcare measure has been introduced to VTOS, however its impact to date has not been outlined. Other schemes and programmes are detailed but no gender analysis is given, no reference is made to issues such as entry/access requirements or childcare provision.

The Green Paper notes that £11m every year is spent on part time education by 22,795 individuals seeking to improve their vocational qualifications through accredited professional programmes (p46&53). It would be most instructive to examine the gender breakdown of this participation. In 1995 only 33% of participants aged 25-35 were female, showing that during the child rearing years, women are not able to access continuing professional development opportunities. This is a key reason for the perpetuation of the glass ceiling whereby women do not reach senior management and decision making positions in organisations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

☒ Part time education needs a total review in the White Paper.

☒ Part time adult education is an integral part of adult and community education and should be given due recognition.

☒ Part time professional development opportunities must be structured flexibly to ensure equal access for people with and without caring responsibilities.

Participation rates

Reference is made to the difference in participation rates by women and men. For example, **"an estimated 50% of literacy students and 80% of community education participants are women".** The conclusion drawn here is that new strategies are necessary to attract men into the system. The misleading impression given is that provision for women is fine and that now it is time to move on to get men involved. It is necessary that particularly young men become involved but it must not be at the expense of women. No systemic analysis of women's education and training groups and why they are so successful is offered, nor is there any serious scrutiny of their limitations, shortcomings and problems. Why has this are being so neglected when it has apparently been so successful? Women's education

groups are seen as successful yet it appears that research is necessary to validate their success, but no such research has been carried out or is planned.

RECOMMENDATIONS

☒ Adult and community educational provision and supports must not ignore women's needs or experiences in the belief that 'women have arrived'.

Upskilling the Workforce:

The Green Paper makes a brief reference to women's participation in the Labour Market but unless admission procedures, which restrict their access to education and training, are removed, and proper childcare facilities are provided, in essence women will continue to find it impossible to enter the workforce. In addition to childcare, there are other problems, in particular, to upskilling, that need attention and which concern state agencies.

Training: Still key agencies such as FAS hold courses on a full time basis for full days, beginning at 8.30 and finishing at 4.30.

Transport: particularly for women in rural areas is a constant problem, yet state training agencies still centralise their training facilities in areas of high population. These arrangements are unsuitable for women.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to provide adequate access, state training agencies need to:

☒ Introduce flexible time schedules on a part time and modular basis to their training programmes and need to deliver these programmes on an outreach basis particularly in rural areas.

☒ Specific initiatives are required to ensure that women can reach their full potential, unrestricted by glass ceilings or corridors.

☒ Need to deliver these programmes on an outreach basis particularly in rural areas.

☒ Any "incentives to companies to engage in continuous upgrading of their workforce" (Sect 4.3 p72) need to be gender proofed, and an explicit requirement to promote equal opportunities and workplace diversity is included.

4. FINANCE AND FUNDING:

The financial implications for women and other adults wishing to access education and training opportunities are immense. The Green Paper does not advocate free access to courses but instead advocates the provision of tax relief: a gender analysis would have been useful here as it would have illustrated that most of the participants in adult education are women, most of these do not have an independent income which would be liable for tax and therefore their access is limited. The self financing rule restricts most adult education provision to those that can have sufficient numbers of fee paying participants to cover the costs involved in provision. This has the effect of denying participation to women who cannot afford the fees.

We note that "national policy is that except for the most disadvantaged, part time education provision should be self financing". For those in low paid jobs (many of them women) this significantly reduces access to lifelong learning opportunities. The availability of tax relief on university undergraduate programmes is not of great assistance in this regard, because it is a) restricted in scope and b) tax relief favours the more highly paid.

There is no specific source of funding for women's groups other than the WEI and the EU EMPLOYMENT NOW funding, both of which are due to finish at the end of 1999.

RECOMMENDATIONS

▣ Within adult education, fees for learning programmes are such that they exclude the most financially marginalised in the community therefore free fees, maintenance grants and tax exemptions need to be re-examined, particularly for those women and other adults participating or wishing to participate education and training courses which are part time, modular or through distance learning.

▣ All fees for continuing education and professional development for people not in the "most disadvantaged" category should attract tax relief and also be grant aided for those on lower pay;

▣ The "other organisations" listed in section 3.8.5 must be actively integrated into the funding structures. Any "incentives to companies to engage in continuous upgrading of their workforce" (Sect 4.3 p72) need to be gender proofed.

▣ The Report issued by the Committee on Funding Mechanisms for Adult and Continuing Education in July 1998 needs to have some pilot implementation at least.

▣ Women specific funding: A significant change at a policy level through the White Paper needs to occur in relation to a willingness to support specific work of women's groups and networks. In order to ensure that the development of policy and practice is underpinned targeted funding to the women's sector in respect to initiatives to improve access, participation in training and education must take place. Such targeted funding should make special provision for those women from social economically and/or educationally disadvantaged backgrounds.

☒ Support to women's groups must take the form of multi annual core funding to enable them to plan ahead and to test out innovative ideas and projects regionally rather than nationally.

5. RESOURCES AND SUPPORTS

Mature Students

Very little policy development around mature students has occurred and it is often a poorly recognised and supported aspect of the educational system, for part time mature students in particular. There are a number of issues regarding mature students which need clarification in the Green Paper. These relate to the aspirational nature of the references made. It suggests a target of 16% mature students into full time courses in third level by 2010 (currently 5%). This is very welcome, but there is no concrete proposal as to how this will be achieved. The need for support to mature students in access and outreach courses is raised, however the issue of finance is not addressed. The Green Paper recommends that in order to increase mature student access to third level courses the following should occur: mature student quotas, attraction of students from lower socio-economic groups, appraisal of current teaching practices, widening the range of provision through modulation, workplace delivery, part time provision, expansion of distance learning provision, more open credit accumulation, and entry routes other than leaving certificate. However, there is no detailed information on how that may be achieved and no attention to resource allocation occurs. The provision of access programmes at foundation level is viewed by the NWCI as an important 'stepping stone' to mature student courses. Excellent models of this have been developed under EMPLOYMENT–NOW by Cork IT, and others.

RECOMMENDATIONS

☒ Concrete mechanisms of provision for mature students need to be demonstrated in the White Paper such as flexible financial resourcing, access information and support, examination and expansion of access programmes at foundation level development of modular degree and other programmes, the development/expansion of part time, day time degree programmes,

☒ Community based pre access courses need be developed and supported.

Information Technology

The expansion in the use of information technology both as a delivery mechanism and as a specific vocational subject has dangers associated with it for target groups like those for instance prioritised under EMPLOYMENT NOW. Technology can either enhance access or reinforce blocks to further education and training. Certainly, the new emerging technology sector offers women exciting opportunities to participate in economic and rural development. The skills to use Information Technology have the potential to provide women with more opportunities for paid employment, offer tools which are valuable on family farms and business, break down barriers to information, education and training, introduce the possibility of non traditional work opportunities and environments and using new ways of organising work, community and family. Information technology is often an integral part of any training or development provision but is not available to many women because of location or circumstances. No innovative strategy for investment in infrastructure or building **"people's capacity to utilise and engage with the burgeoning new**

technologies" (p23) is put forward. Investing in schools is rightly a priority yet the authors of the Paper have not taken into account that not all adult learning nor community education takes place in formal settings, such as those provided by schools or universities. No account is taken of the difficulties women and other groups have in accessing IT.

There is considerable evidence that women and men both react and interact differently to IT. In addition there are the well documented information on the differences in learning style between men and women. It is a matter of grave concern that our new Information Age is being shaped predominately by men, while women are not attracted to either study opportunities or careers in the sector. Therefore we consider that it must become a priority in all forms of adult learning to take specific steps to ensure that women do not become further disadvantaged in the Information Age.

In addition, we are concerned that much provision of IT Training for women, or that integrated into programmes which greatly attract women, is confined to word processing, and the passive use of software packages in traditional jobs. To ensure that the future is balanced, it is vital that women are encouraged, and trained in areas such as software and web design. It is instructive that in a technology developed in the 1990s, the common title used for an individual who designs a web page is "webMASTER", despite the availability of the gender neutral term "webWEAVER".

RECOMMENDATIONS

☒ Develop women-centred strategy of investment in information technology both in terms of training and infrastructure.

☒ Provide innovative plans to engage groups such as women who have less opportunity in accessing information technology.

☒ Develop an integrated approach to attract and retain women in educational opportunities leading to non traditional forms of employment.

☒ Ensure that IT training programmes focus on active as well as passive use of the medium.

Distance Learning

The Green Paper states that the slow development of distance learning opportunities in Ireland as being due to: **"high costs of the initial investment in distance Education" and institutional barriers".** The benefit to rural learners in particular is highlighted in the Green Paper. Much more consideration needs take place around this issue as distance learning is still in its infancy in Ireland. Distance learning can be expensive for the learner, require IT skills and it can be an isolating experience. However it does provide opportunities to the learner, particularly women working within the home, that may be not be accessed otherwise. Considerable research and pilot studies are necessary to progress this aspect of education to determine the full potential of distance learning and to examine ways

of overcoming the factors affecting its progress. Infrastructural supports, considerable financial and training resources in particular need much reflection on behalf of the Department of Education and Science.

Distance education lends itself well to accessing quality programmes from outside Ireland eg via the Open University or Internet.   This may allow participants to gain internationally recognised qualifications in a flexible way. Any national framework for lifelong learning needs to be proactive to these developments in its funding structures.

RECOMMENDATIONS

⊠ Care needs to be taken to ensure that the any educational system which incorporates technological developments accommodate those who may not have access to this resource by reason of distance.

⊠ Research and pilot studies are necessary to assess the process and outcomes of distance education on a gender basis.

⊠ Willingness on behalf of Government to resource and support distance learning programmes

⊠ Generate funding support structures which do not disadvantage individuals who choose to access distance learning programmes offered outside the state.

Capital Investment

No infra structural or capital expenditure appears to be planned for communities in the Green Paper. This is of much concern to the NWCI. The Green Paper puts forward that **"within the constraints of available resources, and with a decline forecast in mainstream enrolment within the school system, it is not considered feasible or cost effective to advocate the development of a separate infrastructure for adult education"** (p85). Empty school buildings in afternoon, evening, weekends and throughout holiday months is far from cost effective. These buildings need to become centres of **lifelong learning**, not just for the purposes of primary or secondary education. There are very few purpose built adult education facilities in Ireland but if adult education is to have equal footing with other elements of the education sector this needs priority. It must be remembered that not all adult education takes place in a formal setting such as a classroom.   A formal setting in many cases inhibits adults from participating in 'second chance' education as it is often a reminder of their negative experiences first time round. The Department of Education and Science needs to put in place local measures which accommodate Adult Education delivery, provide assistance with insurance issues, and assist in financially resourcing groups to rent and indeed buy facilities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

⊠ An increase in purpose-built Adult Education facilities must be proposed in the White Paper. Schools are partial, not complete, answer to infrastructure needs;

☒ Efficient and effective use of existing infrastructure must take place through the creation of centres of lifelong learning that do not inhibit the adult learner;

☒ Investment in local measures which accommodate adult education delivery, provide assistance with insurance issues, and assist in financially resourcing groups to rent and indeed buy facilities.

Outreach

The discussion on outreach in the Green Paper is welcome. The Paper states that a study has been committed to examine the strategies and approaches which are most effective in reaching those who are hardest to reach. When will this study be completed? Innovative outreach approaches involving many different learning sites, learning methodologies and new collaborative provision is necessary. Outreach is necessary for engaging vulnerable groups in communities in education and training. It is the experience of EMPLOYMENT NOW projects that outreach involves making the initial contact in a non threatening, empathic, responsive and relevant manner, building up relationships, engaging people and, supporting them in attending courses, and providing the very important follow up after the course.

RECOMMENDATIONS

☒ Concrete proposals need to be presented in the White Paper on foot of the findings of the study proposed.

☒ Learning generated by successful models of outreach which has been developed under EMPLOYMENT NOW by projects such as Longford ICA and Access 2000 in Wexford/Waterford should be examined by the Department of Education and Science.

Childcare

The NWCI considers that addressing the present childcare crisis is a major priority for Ireland's national development. We impatiently await the report of the Inter-departmental Group considering the issue of childcare, and as members of the grouping, Childcare 2000 Campaign, continue to lobby for urgent change.

The issue of childcare is not sufficiently addressed throughout the Green Paper. Returning to education is a fine juggling act for adults financially and time-wise, but with a dearth of childcare facilities and the cost averaging £85 per week per child, many women do not take this step back to education or training. Childcare constitutes a serious barrier to participation in education, training and work. The inadequacy of current childcare support nationally is a significant barrier to women's participation in adult and community education and training courses. The EMPLOYMENT NOW initiative has proven that the provision of childcare as an integral part of adult and community education and training courses vastly increases the women's engagement, continuation and success. All the NOW projects are deeply committed to furthering childcare in Ireland from a variety of different perspectives. All the projects employed different strategies with regard to

childcare provision – some gave participants childcare allowances, some organised crèche facilities, a significant proportion held training sessions at times that suited women participants i.e. within school –hours and school–terms and many put in place all of these mechanisms.

Childcare is an essential support in counteracting inequality between men and women.   Women continue to carry the majority of childcare and eldercare responsibilities. The Department of Education have a responsibility to ensure that lack of childcare places does not remain an obstacle for women trying to access education and training. The Paper identifies childcare as one of the key issues which impact on future policy and states that **" the need for greater investment in infrastructure, and in supporting services such as childcare**…**"** (p66), but puts no practical proposals or commitments are put forward to progress this.

However, we support the view of the Partnership 2000 Expert Working Group on Childcare:

- that the existing scheme VTOS, YOUTHREACH and Senior Traveller Training Programme to be made permanent and extended to the childcare costs of all low income parents undergoing an education or training programme provided by any State agency.

- that a childcare subsidy is paid to parents on development and adult literacy and community education courses.

- that the current practice of subsidising childcare for disadvantaged children under the Supplementary Welfare Allowance Scheme be broadened to enable parents, who cannot afford childcare, and who are undergoing training and do not qualify for any of the subsidies to purchase childcare places for their children.

- Family commitments, sole responsibility for social care (children, elderly, disabled) and poor support services are major obstacles to women participating in rural development. There is a need to develop new structures and practices in the labour market that facilitate women participation in community and working life.

RECOMMENDATIONS

☒ All training and education programmes must have a range of childcare options readily available for women. i.e. childcare allowances or provision. This is especially important in disadvantaged communities;

☒ Increased provision of childcare facilities in community, educational institutions and workplaces.

☒ Childcare facilities need to be extended to include after–school services.

☒ A national childcare strategy needs to be designed and implemented to ensure equality of access to education and training for women.

☒ The issue of childcare needs to be addressed in a community setting with existing pilot schemes made permanent.

⊠ NWCI supports the recommendation made by the Report of Partnership 2000 Expert Working Group on Childcare, that a childcare subsidy be paid to parents on development, adult literacy and community education courses.

⊠ Specific support proposals for childcare must be clearly stated in the White Paper.

Challenging Stereotypes – women in science and technology

We welcome the commitment to equal opportunities between women and men as expressed in section 4.16. However, concrete proposals are urgently required to underpin these aspirations. We have dealt with many of the issues listed here elsewhere in the submission, in keeping with our belief that it is only until gender equality is mainstreamed throughout the sector that real progress will be made by women.

One key issue not dealt with elsewhere is "exposing participants to a broader range of occupational choices than those usually offered". For women, one of those non traditional areas of education is in science and technology. For historical reasons very many mature women did not have an opportunity to study science at school. However, basic scientific literacy is vitally important to enable individuals to assess developments such as IT, new forms of food, health promotion, environmental risk assessments etc. To build the capacity of women in communities, as mothers and in their careers, a strategy should be developed to address this historical lack of scientific understanding amongst women.

RECOMMENDATION

⊠ A strategy should be developed to integrate the learning of scientific and technological concepts and practices into educational programmes devised for and by women.

6. COMMUNITY EDUCATION

The National Women's Council of Ireland welcomes the fact that community education is acknowledged as a model and method of education. Community education is regarded in the Green Paper as **'depicting an approach and a particular kind of relationship as opposed to a system of provision'** (p89). The Green Paper goes on to point out that this view sees community education in four ways:

- being firmly community based, with local groups taking responsibility for and playing a key role in organising courses, deciding on programme content and recruiting tutors;

- an empowering process, working as an equal partner with the knowledge, skills and experience a learner can offer, and taking account of the cultural and other needs of participants;

- an agent of social change and community advancement, which helps communities and individuals to develop strategies to take a more active role in decision making on issues which affect their lives and those of their families and communities;

- a process built on models of active participation, and inclusive discourse and decision making

The Green Paper goes on to state that this is the view which essentially equates community education with community development, i.e. **"as a process of working in solidarity with marginalised groups towards objectives of empowerment"** (p89).

The Green Paper does not develop a philosophy of Community Education. In fact the concept often appears confused with adult education. Instead it describes the current community education practice and provision though by no means in a fully inclusive way. The Paper does not fully recognise community education as a dynamic and organic model of education. This needs more reflection and consideration.

One of the most vocal proponents of community education is the Coalition of Grassroots Women – a consortium of three women's groups funded under the EMPLOYMENT NOW Initiative. Their approach is linked to certain fundamental beliefs:

- There is a clear distinction between adult education and community education and whereas all community education is a form of adult education and adult learning, not all adult education is community education;

- The mere fact of locating or basing courses in communities so that they become community based courses does not constitute community education;

- Community education is a structured process of conscientisation and awareness raising of groups of adults around key issues that affect

their lives and are learning through participatory action in their communities;

While the coalition supports all calls to establish a better-funded and organised adult education sector, attention needs to be given to the special needs and constraints of community education sector. This sector is distinct from the traditional understanding of Adult Education.

The main differences being:

- The focus on the collective work and communal forms of learning taking place in communities and linked directly into issues of concern in peoples lives;

- The emphasis community education gives to the process through which adult learning is achieved;

- It has a distinct value system which is separate from adult education, with a core emphasis on collective empowerment;

- the value system that community education works within and the emphasis on collective empowerment.

From this perspective flow a number of implications:

Accreditation: There is a need for the formal education sector and the accrediting institutions to work with the community sector towards formulating an appropriate form of accreditation for community education which would:

- structure in mechanisms which will allow for the building up of credits for years of training and experience;

- validate and accredit the learning that is taking place in communities in this collective form, only accreditation systems based on individual achievement is catered for in current arrangements;

- enable community groups to achieve credits without being obliged to hand over their learning to educational institutions;

- simplify the existing accreditation system and decrease its cost. At present, certification with currency is often outside the reach of community groups. This process can also involve loss of ownership of learning, especially when institutions do not acknowledge or understand the values of community education.

Funding:

Structured co-ordinated programmes of community education are not funded in any consistent way and for those working at grassroots community level this is an ever-present problem which can interfere with the forward planning of education programmes. For example, the criteria for running course for a specified number is a factor that can frequently work against community groups.

RECOMMENDATIONS: Community education needs

☒ parity of esteem with adult education

☒ a funding mechanism for allocation for adult education funding for community's needs to be directed towards community groups, rather than filtered through statutory agencies

☒ a clear recognition at a national/statutory level of the difference between the two models

☒ funding mechanisms that are not ad hoc and piecemeal, and that allow the most marginalised to participate

☒ system of accreditation that gives currency to the learning achieved through communal and group learning process.

☒ Community education, when practised effusively, is a very powerful tool for community empowerment. To date, this has only been possible either through voluntary work or as a result of special EU funded interventions such as NOW. The White Paper needs to incorporate **not just the philosophy but the learning and experiences** from these community education initiatives so that the most marginalised in society will have access to a means of development at the pace of the individual learner, the learners own community, a collective/group format, and using a process that is empowering and participatory rather than alienating for the adult learner.

7. ACCREDITATION

The systems for accreditation and certification of learning are, as yet, relatively underdeveloped and community education has been largely unaccredited until recently. The NWCI and EMPLOYMENT NOW are particularly aware that the existing structure of accredited courses tends to exclude women and marginalised women in particular because of:

- rigidity of course design and delivery, time-tabling and assessments methods

- location and costs of courses

- lack of childcare provision

- absence of women friendly methodology that builds on the prior learning and experience of women

- absence of validation mechanism of the knowledge and skills acquired by women through their work.

- lack of advice services to guide women to appropriate options

- lack of linkages between formal and non-formal sectors and between formal providers – this obstructs women progression

- lack of formal recognition of education and training delivered in the community.

The Green Paper recognises that the issues of accreditation, assessment and certification are very important in adult education. The value of women's skills, knowledge, and ways of knowing are too often diminished by the present mainstream. The NWCI views accreditation as a crucial means of the positive re-valuing of women's learning.

We welcome the establishment of a National Qualifications Authority, which will have responsibility for promoting access, transfer and progression into and within education and training. The introduction of Further Education and Training Awards Council which will incorporate the current further education and training certificate functions of FAS, National Tourism Certification Board, Teagasc and the NCVA will give a sense of unity to a currently diverse system of certification.

The main recommendations of the Green Paper in relation to assessment suggest the fast development of a national framework of qualifications with an assessment system that is criterion referenced and outcomes based. Also, the development of transparent mechanisms for the accreditation and assessment of prior learning and work based experience as a priority in adult education. The suggestions in relation to assessment in the Green Paper are certainly welcome.

RECOMMENDATIONS: The National Qualification Framework must:

☑ ensure access for disadvantaged groups,

☑ facilitate learners attaining the level and standard of learning they require,

☒ facilitate learning in ways and places most appropriate to the needs and circumstances of the learners,

☒ use a variety of assessment methods. Frequently adults undergo assessment methods which are inappropriate to the type of learning they wish to demonstrate or required to complete assignments which are inappropriate given the person's level of particular knowledge and competency. Practice in EMPLOYMENT NOW shows the effectiveness of designing and using assessment methods which are appropriate to the type of learning and the life experience of the learner. Related to this is the practice of ensuring that all possible learning environments are utilised.

☒ deliver certification for 'new' areas of education, training and work e.g. community education and social economy

☒ guarantee official recognition of learning,

☒ provide entry points to all levels of the system,

☒ develop and publicise progression routes, and

☒ ensures mobility of certification.

☒ include all stakeholders in the process of developing quality assurance systems

☒ create sufficient means by which courses delivered in contexts other than formal or traditional environments can be formally assessed, accredited and linked by way of progression routes to mainstream courses.

☒ promote coherence between the various systems that currently exist for the accreditation. This will necessitate encouraging the prompt development of mechanisms for assessing equivalence between awards/credits for example from NUI and NCEA systems, between UK and other EU awards and Irish systems (transnational) and within the NUI system i.e. between extra mural/access courses and mainstream university courses.

☒ actively promote a culture of equality, respect and mutual learning between vocational, academic and non mainstream strands of education and training.

☒ include the community and voluntary sector as equal stakeholders in the accreditation system

APL:
The issue of accredited prior learning is very important in the issue of accreditation. The Green Paper recognises this and makes the point that **'there are generally poorly developed mechanisms for the accreditation or certification of prior learning, particularly of prior experiential learning'.** Crediting adults with life experience which is not necessarily academic particular in the context of this Green Paper is of crucial importance. It is one of the features of EMPLOYMENT NOW that participating women through their life experience often in voluntary and paid work or previous courses gained knowledge and skills which can be measured and accounted for as part of selection process. Further the design of courses to incorporate individual participant's level of knowledge and experience and the same at group level, is a fundamental feature of the programmes that are delivered. Thus mechanisms are devised to recognise the learning adults have achieved as a result of work and life experience, and these are incorporated into the content of the

course. Suitable APL systems should be an integral element of an integrated framework.

RECOMMENDATIONS

⊠ That an integrated framework of accreditation is established in Ireland that will take account of existing accrediting systems and establish ladders of progression between these.

⊠ Establish mechanisms for the recognition, validation and assessment of knowledge and skills acquired through non-academic forms of learning i.e. community based courses and unpaid work. This will involve the design of flexible and accessible APL methods which can include the knowledge and skills acquired by women through their unpaid work in the home and in the community

In our view we must aim to develop and deliver an accreditation system which facilitates clear and meaningful access and progression to formally recognised and valued qualifications, **for all,** via flexible and appropriate models of assessment and certification and mutually recognised quality assurance systems.

The vast bulk of the work remains in relation to ensuring the framework is **responsive**, i.e. capable of hearing and listening to the needs of the learners, **flexible**, i.e. capable of validating in a variety of ways and settings and **valued**, i.e. by purchasers as effectively demonstrating knowledge and ability.

⊠ Whilst recognising the absence of a national policy/strategy on the provision of childcare it is important to stress that education and training bodies genuinely seeking to offer accredited courses to women must build in childcare needs in the design of programmes.

⊠ An effective accreditation framework should have the capacity to allow women to move in and out of the system and to transfer credits without penalty.

⊠ If women are to have access to real and meaningful accredited learning a system of validating through crediting women's skills and knowledge in the social economy must be found.

⊠Accessible accreditation depends upon the development of a range of assessment modes and techniques which measure all learning outcomes e.g. skills, knowledge, experiential, attitudinal, social etc.

⊠ A cohesive national framework of accreditation providing access, progression and mobility between sectors must be flexible in recognising who can facilitate learning.

Training of Adult Educators

The NWCI concurs with the views of the authors of the Green Paper of the need for developments that will professionalise the sector. We note that "ensuring motivation, relevance and taking account of the cultural and community context of the participants are central tasks" We consider that this cannot be done without an explicit reference to the gender of the participants.

However, the views are aspirational therefore the White Paper must:

RECOMMENDATIONS:

☒ Clarify structures and investment for ongoing in-service training

☒ Ensure that the proposed structures of recognised qualifications for adult educators, are in themselves fully gender inclusive.

☒ Clarify representation and role and value of the Forum for Adult Education practitioners.

☒ present concrete plans for the role, brief and representation of the proposed interagency Working Group on formal recognition of qualifications for Adult Education practitioners

☒ Take into account the insights and perspective of the community, voluntary and women's sector regarding the importance of experience and of values.

☒ That the Department of Education and Science undertake an information and PR campaign to promote awareness amongst the general public and specifically among employers of the evolving accreditation framework for adult educators.

8. INFORMATION, GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING

The Green Paper points out that "range and guidance counselling services available to adult learners is both limited and fragmented" (p62). In another section the Paper states that "there is no system of guidance or counselling in the education sector to cater for adult needs"(p104). The NWCI welcomes the proposal for locally based educational guidance and counselling. The availability of good quality information, advice and guidance can have a critical role in encouraging people to become involved in learning. However there are no concrete proposals regarding the provision of such a local service. More work needs to be done to define exactly what kind of service should be available and how it will be resourced.   Information on education and training options and how it will be delivered receives scant attention. An information, advice, guidance and counselling service will require a whole range resources for example:

- The development of taster and induction programmes (pre development)

- Personal growth and individual counselling.

- A good quality referral process

- Provision of basic information about all learning opportunities available locally

- Provide information and advice on a range of practical issues related to accessing local learning opportunities, including: location of learning providers, public transport arrangements, availability of childcare, finance, accessibility for people with disabilities etc.

- Advice on moving between learning and employment opportunities

- Counselling and advice about learning opportunities taking into account personal circumstance

- Helping clients to interpret information and to choose the most appropriate action

- **"Hand – holding":** Working with adults to assist them in discovering and clarifying their needs and various ways of meeting them.

- **Assessment:** Enabling clients in a non directive way, to obtain a structured understanding of their personal, educational and vocational development in order to make sound judgements about the appropriateness of particular opportunities.

- **Mediation:** Support in dealing with agencies that provide or influence learning and employment opportunities and enabling adults to deal with these agencies.

- Any guidance must act according to certain criteria that includes accessibility, creditability, impartiality, integrity, recognisability, reliability and visibility.

- The service must be client centred, confidential, impartial, provide equality of opportunity and most importantly must be accessible.

- Build up skills portfolio and look at options available to them

RECOMMENDATIONS:

☒ Information, advice and guidance services must be holistic and tailored to personal circumstances. Some women for example find it useful to talk through what is available locally, how it may relate to employment opportunities and where they can go for further help, others may need a more tailored service, which may include in depth counselling.

☒ Proposed services must be free of charge

☒ Services must equally apply to those in employment, education or training

☒ Should be high quality in order to meet the needs of users,

☒ Needs to take place throughout an individual's life, not just during unemployment.

☒ Innovative measures such as those in the UK like a national 'helpline' to provide information and advice about learning need to be proposed and plans for implementation in the White Paper included.

9. ADULT & COMMUNITY EDUCATION IN RURAL AREAS

> The absence of the rural perspective is very evident throughout the Green Paper.

Educational opportunity and training are essential elements in women's personal, social and economic development, and the social and economic development of their communities. Foundation programmes taken in personal, social and community development are important in engaging participants in the whole rural development process. Personal development for women is becoming more widely available with the establishment of women's groups the rural areas. These groups provide support and advice for women, helping them to gain more control over their lives by defining their own needs and deciding how they can be met. But organisation of these groups is usually done on a voluntary basis. Very little is invested from local or national government. Barriers to women accessing training and educational in rural areas remain immense.

RECOMMENDATIONS

☒ The need for a rural community information, advice and guidance service/system (mobile units).

☒ Provision of rural childcare facilities alongside training and educational programmes is essential, or alternatively, provide childcare allowances. Choice and flexibility in provision is necessary.

☒ Provision to be made to assist in transport costs incurred by women living in outer areas to attend education, training and development programmes.

☒ Funding of locally-based women's rural groups.

☒ Account must be taken of the social care responsibilities of women i.e. elderly, disabled. Improved service provision in rural areas is required. The payment of care allowance to assist women in meeting this cost while on a development course is recommended.

☒ The establishment of outreach/distance learning developments is required as a matter of urgency.

☒ That the Department of Education and Science should evaluate the issues and the recommendations which NOW Projects have made on rural education and training, with a view to identifying ways in which they can act, to facilitate the greater participation of women in education and training in Ireland.

☒ Provision of locally based courses for women by Teagasc, CERT and FAS. These courses should have a holistic approach including personal development, support systems, counselling, analysis of community potential for development of both women and their environment etc., and should have the potential to provide progression routes for women into mainstream programmes provided by these agencies.

☒ Waive the fees for third level education for distance learners to equalize financial access with residential students.

☒ Increased provision of adult education and training programmes at flexible times i.e. part-time day and evening or weekend programmes.

☒ Flexibility on behalf of government departments, with regard to allowances for unemployed women returning to education and training.

☒ IT must be incorporated into all education and training courses as well as resourcing communities in IT infrastructure.

10. STRUCTURES

Chapter 8 of the Green Paper deals with proposed new structures for the administration of adult education in Ireland. There are many agencies involved in the provision of adult education. The Green Paper has highlighted this fact in a very comprehensive and detailed fashion. It is stated in the Green Paper that **"the absence of a coherent, adequately funded and proactive body at central level has been an important factor in the under development of the adult education sector up to now"** (p116). The proposal to establish a National Adult Learning Council is a welcome one, but little detail is given as how this council will operate.

On a local level it has been suggested in the Green Paper that **"Local Adult Learning Boards on a broad partnership basis, charged with responsibility for co-ordinating the provision of adult education in their respective regions"** (p119) should be developed. The Green Paper does not specify the extent of the regions that these local boards would represent, and what their actual remit will be. It is disappointing that the Green Paper was so aspirational and not more specific in relation to this development. The nature of representation on these local adult education boards seems very large and there is the grave possibility that these boards will be taken up with bureaucratic decision making and unnecessary expenditure rather than on directing resources to those most in need. The provision and supports to adults would be enhanced significantly through greater collaboration and planned co-operation.

The proposals of any new structures for the delivery of programmes require more consideration. To establish the best methods of implementing a successful adult education policy that will benefit everyone. The Green Paper could have being more specific regarding the mechanisms necessary to implement its proposals in this area. There is a vagueness with regard to representation and consultation mechanism. Indeed the limited consultation mechanisms of the Department of Education and Science and the lack of funding supports for consultation of local groups does not auger well for future consultation plans. No plan regarding the timeframe or financial investments is proposed in the Green Paper.   There needs to be evidence that changes will benefit the wider community and represent tangible improvement to the present situation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

☒ It is important that the ethos of the various community, voluntary and women's groups will be respected and guaranteed.

   With regard to local structures they must be:

   well resourced both in terms of finance and human resources;

   work within a planned time-frame 5-10 years;

   be consistently monitored and evaluated;

   resource of the participant/community sector to participate realistically in the structures;

   include in their composition 50% gender balance;

include in their composition 50% adult learner (participant) balance.

☒ in planning and implementation, particular cognisance is required with regard to women's, Travellers, people with disability etc. educational and training needs.

☒ With regard to National Adult Learning Council as an executive body of the Department of Education and Science, its representation, consultation, linking with the Further Education and Training Awards Council and the Higher Education and Training Awards Council, and its role in terms of the Local Adult Education Boards are all vague and must be clarified.

☒ Specific funding need to be made available from the national exchequer, for Community Education, grassroots womens education, and other marginalised groupings' education

☒ That 40% of the membership of the NALC is drawn from the Adult learners, and especially from learners in the marginalised community /voluntary/women's sectors. That such participation is ensured by putting the necessary supports in place to enable the learners to participate full (childcare, transport costs, out of pocket expense, and expense account and some secretarial support – given that they will not be part of large organisations with the necessary infrastructure of professional support already in place.

☒ That the 40% gender balance be ensured and structured into the selection process, in the formation of the NALC.

APPENDIX

Background to the National Women's Council of Ireland and NOW

The National Women's Council of Ireland, Comhairle Naisiunta na mBan in Eirinn, a non–governmental organisation (NGO), is the national representative organisation for women and women's groups in Ireland. It was founded in 1973 as the Council for the Status of Women. Its foundation was preceded by the formation of an ad hoc network of women's organisations who had successfully lobbied for the establishment of a national Commission of the Status of Women in 1970. The Commission, appointed by the Government, reviewed the position of women in Ireland and made recommendations on action needed to achieve women's rights. Following publication of the Commission's report in 1972, the Council for the Status of Women was set up, by the members of the ad hoc network, to monitor the implementation of the report, and to act as a co-ordinating body for women's organisations in Ireland.

Over twenty five years, the role of the Council has expanded and changed. Maintaining its role as a non–governmental organisation, it has addressed many complex and often controversial issues affecting women. In 1995 the Council completed an internal review which led to the adoption of a strategic plan, new organisational structures and a new name – the National Women's Council of Ireland. Today the National Women's Council of Ireland, a company limited by guarantee, works to achieve change through a range of action and activity, maintaining its independent voice and a commitment to inclusiveness reflecting its broad membership.

Aims and Objectives

The National Women's Council of Ireland, Comhairle Naisiunta na mBan in Eirinn, share a common vision, working together to transform society into a just and equitable community, a community in which all women and men can participate with equal effectiveness as full citizens, in which the independence of women is determined by right.

As the collective voice of Irish women's organisations our work is aimed at:

- Shaping society so that all women can achieve their true potential;

- Ensuring that the law advances equality and places no barriers in its way;

- Changing attitudes to ensure the recognition of the individual dignity of each woman;

- Removing all threats of violence to women and children both inside and outside the home;

- Monitoring to ensure that the effects of poverty on women and children is highlighted and removed;

- Achieving access to appropriate, affordable and quality health care for all women and protecting and promoting reproductive health rights;

- Creating an education system in which women and young girls can participate fully and which fosters quality and respect.

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Membership

The National Women's Council of Ireland has always been committed to bringing together women and women's organisations which reflect the rich and diverse life experience of women in Ireland today. Through its affiliate organisations, urban and rural, local, regional and national, the NWCI represents an estimated 300,000 women. The membership includes major national organisations, community-based groups, service and support providers, professional bodies and women in business, trade unions, politics and farming.

The National Women's Council of Ireland provides the Support Structure for **EMPLOYMENT NOW** in Ireland. EMPLOYMENT NOW is part of a European Union Employment Initiative which will operate until the end of 1999. Since 1992 with an investment of over IR£16 millions, the aim of the 104 Irish NOW projects has been to reduce unemployment, increase opportunities for women to access education and training and to improve the position of those already in the workforce through the promotion of equal opportunity strategies.

NOW focuses on the integration of women into all aspects of the Labour Market – vocational training and education, employment and enterprise creation. The role of the NOW Programme, as the final EU driven commitment to women specific programmes, is to support the development of innovative programmes that meet new needs of women or fills gaps in current provision through the creation of options which motivate, encourage and affirm women as well as give a passport to further education, training and employment.