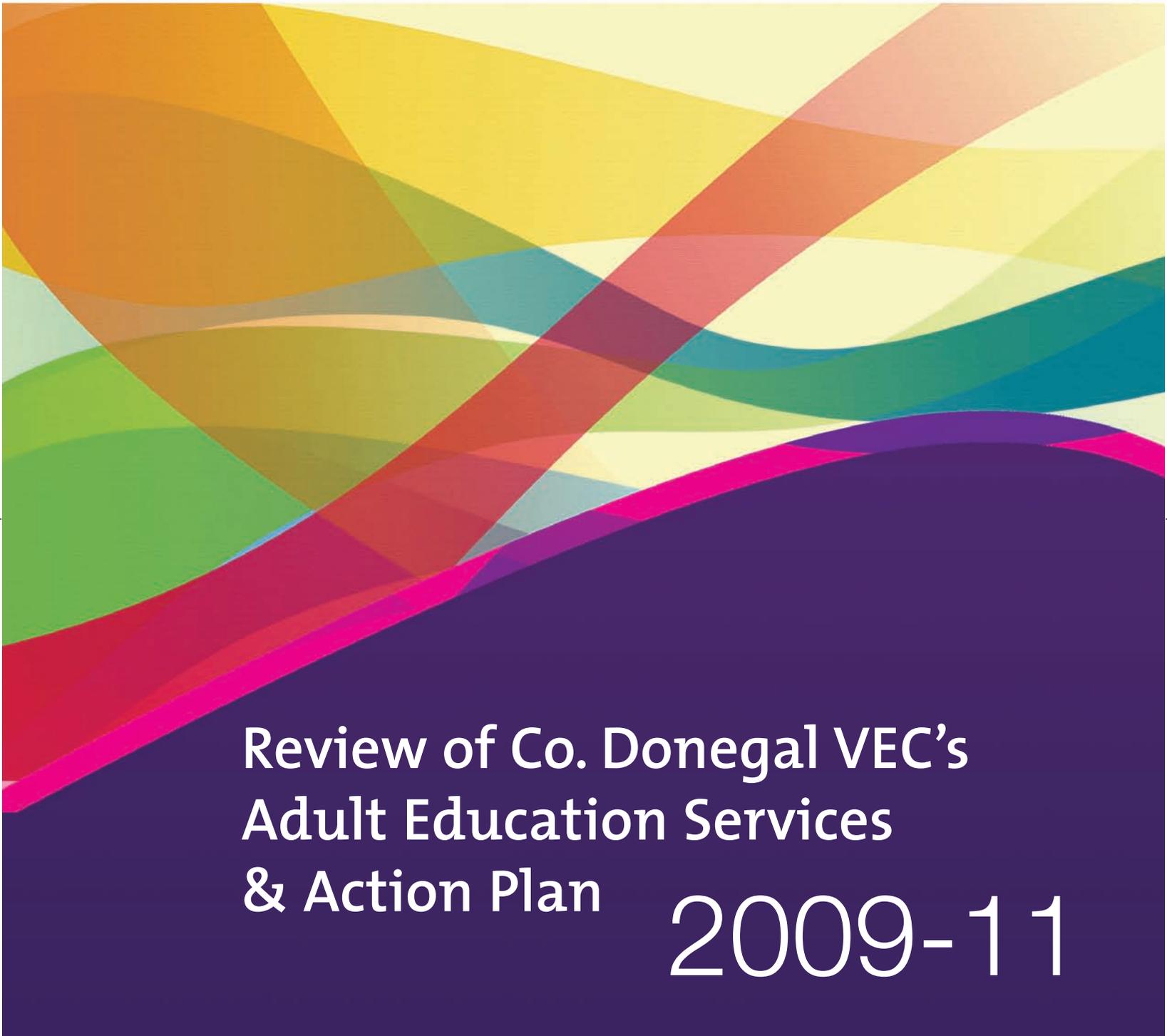


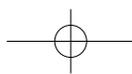
Coiste Gairmoideachais Chontae Dhún na nGall
County Donegal Vocational Education Committee



**Review of Co. Donegal VEC's
Adult Education Services
& Action Plan** 2009-11



Seirbhísí Oideachais Aosaigh
Adult Education Services





Coiste Gairmoideachais Chontae Dhún na nGall
County Donegal Vocational Education Committee

Adult Education Services
Seirbhísí Oideachais Aosaigh



**Review & Equality Impact Assessment of
Co Donegal VEC's Adult Education Services
& Action Plan 2009-2011**

February 2009

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- Claire Galligan, Focus Group Facilitator
- Mick Conboy, Equality Adviser
- Cathal Kelly, Development Officer, The Equality Authority

Particular thanks are due to Dr Sandra Buchanan, Youthreach County Co-ordinator, who compiled this report.

Glossary of Abbreviations

ABE	Adult Basic Education
AEO	Adult Education Officer
AEGI	Adult Education Guidance Initiative
AETC	Adult Education & Training Centre
ALOs	Adult Literacy Organisers
BMW	Border Midlands and West
BTEI	Back to Education Initiative
CDB	County Development Board
CDP	Centre Development Planning
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CSO	Central Statistics Office
DALGS	Donegal Adult Learner Guidance Service
DCC	Donegal County Council
DES	Department of Education and Science
DETE	Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment
DLDC	Donegal Local Development Company
DSFA	Department of Social and Family Affairs
ECDL	European Computer Driving Licence
EqIA	Equality Impact Assessment
EQF	Evolving Quality Framework
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
EO	Education Officer
ESF	European Social Fund
FÁS	Foras Áiseanna Saothair
FETAC	Further Education and Training Awards Council
HETAC	High Education and Training Awards Council
HSCL	Home School Community Liaison
HSE	Health Service Executive
ICE	Internal Centre Evaluation
IDP	Inishowen Development Partnership
IT	Information Technology
NALA	National Adult Literacy Agency
NAPS	National Anti-Poverty Strategy
NDP	National Development Plan
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
NQAI	National Qualification Authority of Ireland
OCN	Open College Network
OCR	Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations
OEC	Outdoor Education Centre
QAS	Quality Assurance System
QFI	Quality Framework Initiative
RSA	Royal Society of Arts
SEC	State Examination Commission
SDT	Strategy Development Team
SFSS	Social and Family Support Service
STTC	Senior Traveller Training Centre
SWG	Sectoral Working Groups
VEC	Vocational Education Committee
VFM	Value for Money
VTOS	Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme

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Foreword

Co Donegal VEC's Adult Education Service completed its first Plan (2005-2009) in 2004. Many changes have occurred in the intervening five years, with the most momentous of these happening in the past few months. The development of a new Plan is timely in that adult and further education services are likely to be in greater demand than ever before and a key component of social stability and economic recovery.

In 2005 the Committee celebrated the Centenary of the delivery of educational services to individuals and communities in County Donegal and produced its first Education Plan in 2006. The preparation and the publication of the Education Plan (2006-2010) was based on a number of key principles including consultation, participation, inclusiveness and enhanced cohesion in the delivery of services to meet the educational needs and aspirations of the adult and school-age students under the Committee's remit.

This Review of the Adult Education Service and development of a new Plan (2009-2011) is undertaken as an element of the Committee's overall Strategic Education Plan for 2006-2010 in that its findings and recommended actions are intrinsically linked with and presented under the five themes outlined in the Education Plan, namely:

- Education Service Provision
- Learning Environment
- Organisational Development
- Partnership
- Image and Identity

The Plan was developed through a wide consultation process with representatives of all stakeholder groups involved in delivery and management of the Adult Education Service: students, staff (including tutors, programme managers and support staff), the VEC Adult Education Board and Strategy Development Team, and external organisations and community groups.

An innovative feature of the development of this Plan was the inclusion of an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) of the proposed actions. This EqIA was carried out as part of a pilot project between the IVEA, the Equality Authority and Co Donegal VEC, and it explored how the proposed Plan promotes equality and prevents discrimination against individuals and groups listed in the equality legislation.

On behalf of the Committee, I am very pleased to publish this Review of the Adult Education Service and Action Plan (2009-2011).

In doing so, I record my thanks to all who were involved in the process of consultation and preparation and, in particular to:

- Dr Sandra Buchanan, Youthreach County Co-ordinator, who compiled the Review and Action Plan
- Ms Claire Galligan who conducted the Focus Group discussions with stakeholders
- Mr Mick Conboy who conducted the Equality Impact Assessment
- Mr Cathal Kelly, Development Officer, The Equality Authority
- Adult Education Service Senior Staff Team, who planned and co-ordinated the Review
- Adult Education Board and VEC Strategy Development Team
- All learners, staff and other stakeholders who participated so enthusiastically in the process

Seán Ó Longáin
Chief Executive Officer (CEO)
Co Donegal VEC
February 2009

1. INTRODUCTION

Co Donegal VEC's Adult Education Service developed its first comprehensive strategic plan in 2004, covering the five year period 2005-2009. During the intervening period the Service has witnessed considerable changes in programme and service provision in terms of increased funding, the significant expansion of student participation numbers and the introduction of a number of comprehensive quality assurance systems. Moreover, Co Donegal VEC itself has undergone considerable change in its operational framework: in 2001 VECs, under the provisions of the Vocational Education (Amendment) Act (2001), were required to produce five year Education Plans to guide their work. Co Donegal VEC's first Education Plan covers the period 2006-2010, setting out its development needs and work programme. With this in mind and with the current strategic plan nearing the end of its lifespan, it was deemed necessary to step back and review the plan and the Service generally and to begin the forward planning process for the next three year period.

This review is particularly timely in light of the current economic climate facing the country in general and Co Donegal in particular. Despite the numerous successes of the Service over the last five years, it faces some uncertainty over the next five years in terms of reduced resources¹ and increased levels of demand. The Central Statistics Office (CSO) officially confirmed the country was in recession in September 2008², while the European Commission noted that all fifteen euro zone countries had slipped into a shallow recession in November.³ Moreover, the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) made one of its grimmest forecasts on the state of the economy in its Quarterly Economic Commentary in Winter 2008, predicting an ever increasing unemployment rate, to average at 9.4% in 2009⁴, while Davy Stockbrokers expect the

¹ Department of Education & Science. 'Main Estimate Features', 14 October 2008. <http://www.education.ie/servlet/blobServlet/PR08-10-14.doc>, accessed 15 October 2008. This included a cut of €8.5 million in adult and further education nationally for 2009 alone.

² Hennessy, M., Fitzgerald, M. and O'Halloran, B. 'Exchequer Faces €7bn Tax Shortfall as Recession Confirmed' in *The Irish Times*, 26 September 2008

³ 'Euro Zone Has Slumped into Recession – EU', www.rte.ie, accessed 03 November 2008. See also 'Eurozone Officially in Recession', www.bbc.co.uk, 14 November 2008

⁴ Barrett, A., Kearney, I., and Goggin, J. *Quarterly Economic Commentary, Winter 2008*. Dublin: ESRI, 2008, p.1. This was a considerable increase on their October predictions and indeed, that of FÁS. See Slattery, L. 'Jobless Will Jump to 8% Next Year, Say ESRI' in *The Irish Times*, 08 October 2008 and Burke-Kennedy, E. 'FAS Forecasts 8.1% Unemployment' in *The Irish Times*, 24 October 2008

unemployment rate to rise to 12% in 2010.⁵ The national unemployment rate has risen steadily throughout 2008 from 4.9% in January 2008, to 6.3% in July, to 7.8% in November during which 16,900 people signed on the unemployment register in that month alone.⁶ In December 2008 this percentage had risen to 8.3%.⁷ Additionally the CSO also confirmed a huge increase in the number of those aged under twenty-five claiming jobseeker's benefit in the twelve months to October 2008, including an increase of 73.4% in Co Donegal.⁸

This presents Co Donegal VEC's Adult Education Service with a considerable challenge in terms of providing programmes and services which will meet the needs of educationally disadvantaged individuals and communities throughout the county in a changed local, national and indeed, global, environment.

In addition, this review has been undertaken in tandem with an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) of the Service, in partnership with the Equality Authority, to assess whether the Action Plan 'promotes equality for; accommodates diversity for and does not discriminate...against individuals and groups across the nine grounds of the equality legislation that experience inequality.'⁹ These nine grounds are gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race and membership of the Traveller community. This was a pilot EqIA, the first one to be undertaken nationally by a VEC and the Equality Authority and presents an attempt by Co Donegal VEC's Adult Education Service not only to 'equality proof' its Action Plan but to also influence the planning discourse amongst its staff.

The review report is presented in four main sections. After briefly outlining the research methodologies employed to undertake this review and the EqIA (section 2), an overview of the Service is then provided (section 3). This was necessary as the programmes and

⁵ Labanyi, D. 'Unemployment May Climb to 12%, Report Says' in *The Irish Times*, 05 December 2008; Logue, P. 'Dole Office Get 115 Extra Staff as Jobless Numbers Soar' in *The Irish Times*, 05 December 2008

⁶ <http://www.cso.ie/statistics/sasunemprates.htm> (Seasonally Adjusted Standardised Unemployment Rates), accessed 16 January 2009; 'Unemployment at Highest Since '96', www.rte.ie, accessed 03 December 2008

⁷ <http://www.cso.ie/statistics/sasunemprates.htm>, accessed 16 January 2009

⁸ De Bréadún, D. 'Increase in Under-25s Signing On' in *The Irish Times*, 08 October 2008

⁹ Irish Vocational Education Association / The Equality Authority. *Guidelines for Conducting Equality Impact Assessments on IVEA and VEC Plans, Policies and Programmes*. Dublin: IVEA/The Equality Authority, 2007, p.9. The equality legislation is the Employment Equality Act, 1998 and the Equal Status Act, 2004.

services are numerous and can appear complex to those not familiar with this part of Co Donegal VEC's service. Next, the operational context under which the Service operates is outlined (section 4); given the changed and, indeed, rapidly evolving national economic context, this is particularly important as it pertains not only to future demands on service provision from local communities but also to the future funding of the Service. The operational context is reviewed in terms of a socio-economic assessment of the County, the organisational structure and strategic operation of Co Donegal VEC and the policy context within which the Service operates, both nationally and locally. Finally, section 5 presents the findings from the review in terms of practice recommendations for the next three year plan (2009-2011). These findings, which essentially form the recommended actions, are presented strategically by direct linkage to the five themes of Co Donegal VEC's Education Plan which are:

1. Education Service Provision
To provide an educational and training service that meets current and emerging needs of communities and individuals in Co Donegal
2. Learning Environment
To provide a quality environment which is conducive to learning and teaching
3. Organisational Development
To ensure that our service is supported by an appropriate organisational structure and the necessary human, technical and financial resources
4. Partnership
In a spirit of partnership to strengthen, and maximise the potential of our relationships in all areas of our service
5. Image and Identity
To promote a dynamic and progressive image and identity of County Donegal VEC and its services.

A strategic approach is necessary in light of the increased demands faced by Co Donegal VEC in general and by the Adult Education Service in particular, to maximise performance through better organisation and better use of existing resources.

Embedded within these findings and recommendations is the Equality Impact Assessment.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This review/strategic planning process and equality impact assessment were carried out over three months from mid-October 2008 to mid-January 2009. A range of research methods were employed in undertaking this review, in order to maximise the value of the data gathered and create confidence in the end product, the Action Plan for 2009-2011.

The research strategy was largely of a qualitative nature, although a very limited quantitative strategy was also employed in terms of using statistics to inform the socio-economic profile of the county within the operational context. This was achieved mainly through the use of the 2006 Census of Population. While use of the Census is one of the most accurate ways of determining such information, it obviously is not the most up to date (as the last Census was completed in 2006), so more current information was incorporated through the use of supplementary information such as newspaper articles for example. Qualitatively, all sections of the operational context were informed by a documentary analysis, particularly the exploration of the local and national policy contexts. National documents included the White Paper on Adult Education, the National Development Plan (NDP) 2007-2013, the Tomorrows Skills report, Department of Education and Science (DES) Value for Money (VFM) Review(s) and relevant legislation, while local documents included Co Donegal VEC's Education Plan 2006-2010, Adult Education Services Strategic Plan 2005-2009 and An Straitéis (Donegal County Strategy 2002-2012).

Focus groups were also used to inform the review. Ten focus groups in total were facilitated by an independent facilitator. They included four student groups, five staff-related groups and one external stakeholders group, including the Adult Education Board¹⁰ and consisted of 152 people, 104 females and 48 males. Their feedback, comments and opinions were central to informing the development of the Action Plan and in framing practice for the coming years. While these focus groups were conducted in a confidential manner and all comments remain confidential, where necessary some of the comments have been quoted directly where this was deemed necessary to

¹⁰ See Appendix 2.

illustrate a point. However, the identity of those who made the comments has not been revealed.

Alongside this review of the Adult Education Service an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) was also conducted, funded by the Equality Authority. As outlined in the introduction, an EqIA is:

a process that seeks to test whether a proposed plan, programme or policy promotes equality for; accommodates diversity for and does not discriminate (including making reasonable accommodation for people with disabilities) against individuals and groups across the nine grounds of the equality legislation that experience inequality.¹¹

The main purpose of this EqIA was to help ensure that the review and actions took account of these needs and essentially involved 'placing equality at the centre of decision making.'¹² As laid out in the guidelines specifically developed for this process by the Equality Authority and the Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA) for VECs, a number of steps were involved:

- Employment of an Equality Adviser, Mr Mick Conboy, to **gather data and relevant information** on the groups across the nine grounds, particular to Co Donegal
- Analysis of the data to **assess the potential impact** of the plan on any of the groups
- **Formally consulting representatives** of these groups to seek and explore their views on the data gathered, the impact assessment and any changes required to the plan based on the impact assessment (this took place on 11 December 2008. See Appendix 2 for a list of groups invited)
- **Deciding on required changes** (if any) to the plan based on these consultations to enhance the impact of the plan on these groups

A further step, **monitoring the implementation** of the plan to check its impact on these groups, will be required once the implementation of the plan begins.

¹¹ Irish Vocational Education Association / The Equality Authority. Op. cit., 2007, p.9. As previously noted, the nine grounds are gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race and membership of the Traveller community.

¹² Ibid.

The review faced a number of research limitations, primarily the limited timeframe available within which to conduct it, due to time restrictions placed on the Equality Authority funding for the EqIA. Consequently, the operational context of the county is not as detailed as it could have been in terms of context analysis, while more comprehensive focus groups or in-depth individual interviews could not be carried out. Additionally, the rapidly changing economic environment also presented the difficulty of almost immediately rendering the recommendations for future practice somewhat unrealistic in light of likely budgetary cuts in the adult and further education sector.

The focus group sessions were conducted by an external facilitator and a consultant was employed to carry out the EqIA. The review research, analysis and writing up was carried out internally by a member of the Adult Education Service Senior Staff Team with research, report writing and planning skills, and overseen by the Adult Education Senior Staff Team. This approach was adopted because the Adult Education Service is a complex one and the time restrictions outlined above did not allow for an independent researcher to become familiar with the intricacies of the Service. Cost was also a factor.

3. OVERVIEW OF ADULT EDUCATION SERVICES

Co Donegal VEC's Adult Education Service provides education and training to a wide range of adult students from 16 years of age upwards, covering Levels 1-5 of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). Its programmes and support services are provided across the county and islands in six dedicated Adult Education and Training Centres (AETCs), four Youthreach training centres (Glengad, Letterkenny, Lifford and Killybegs), two Adult Learner Guidance offices and numerous outreach centres such as libraries, primary and second-level schools, community centres and family resource centres. Programmes and services are provided on both a part-time and full-time basis. On a part-time basis these include:

- Back to Education Initiative (BTEI)
- Basic Education programme (Learning for Living)
- Information Technology (IT) training centre
- Mobile IT programme
- Self-financing night classes

On a full-time basis these include:

- Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) for the long-term unemployed
- Youthreach programme for early school leavers
- Senior Traveller Training Centre (STTC)

Support Services are also provided in the form of:

- Community Education Support Service
- Adult Learner Guidance Service
- Childcare Support

In 2008 over 12,000 students accessed the VEC's adult education programmes and support services across the county in a variety of settings as outlined above. As Figure 3.1 illustrates, this is part of the continued increase in participation numbers witnessed by the Service over the last decade:

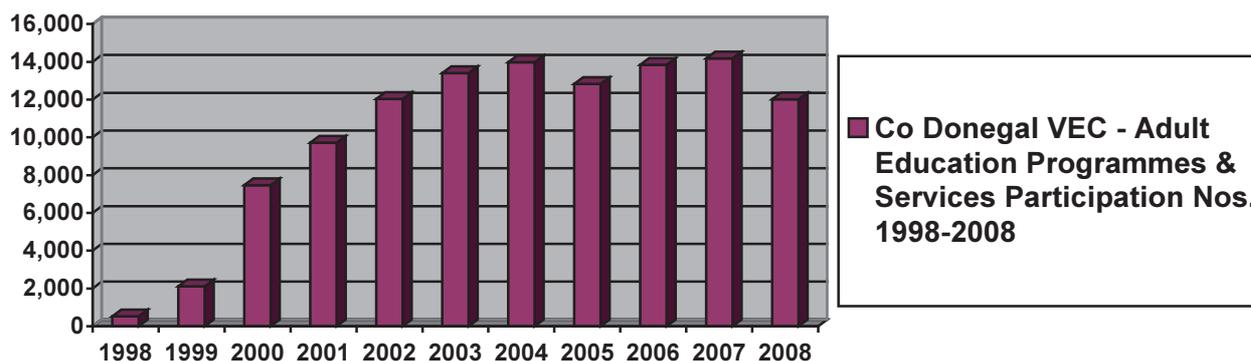


Figure 3.1:
Adult Education Programmes & Services Participation Numbers 1998-2008

Further analysis of these participation numbers is provided in Table 3.1 which illustrates the increase in participation numbers per programme and service. This reflects the government's increase in funding over this period in line with the publication of the government's first White Paper on Adult Education in July 2000.¹³

Table 3.1:
Adult Education Programmes & Services Participation Numbers 1998-2008

	BTEI	Adult Guidance Service	Basic Education	Community Education	VTOS	Youthreach & STTC	Night Classes	ITTC	Mobile IT Unit	OVERALL TOTAL
1998			150			104		267		521
1999			225		85	139	1,375	289		2,113
2000			477	2,840	120	164	3,276	339	252	7,468
2001			656	2,790	160	164	4,107	512	1,331	9,720
2002		141	1,379	4,150	180	189	3,987	574	1,431	12,031
2003	378	335	1,536	4,725	180	189	3,852	765	1,442	13,402
2004	786	462	1,863	4,619	180	189	3,669	929	1,274	13,971
2005	795	772	2,333	3,926	180	189	3,012	590	1,025	12,822
2006	719	744	3,189	4,380	180	189	2,885	585	973	13,844
2007	668	741	3,118	5,600	180	189	2,256	698	732	14,182
2008	619	811	2,935	4,321	180	199	1,945	392	611	12,013

The Service is managed by two Adult Education Officers (AEOs) who are supported in their duties by the Adult Education Board. The Adult Education Senior Staff Team, (consisting of the Adult Education Officers and County Co-ordinators for each programme and service) co-ordinates the sharing and co-operation of information and

¹³ Department of Education & Science. *Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education*. Dublin: Government of Ireland, 2000

activities between programmes across the county. Figure 3.2 below illustrates where Adult Education Services fits into Co Donegal VEC's education and service provision.

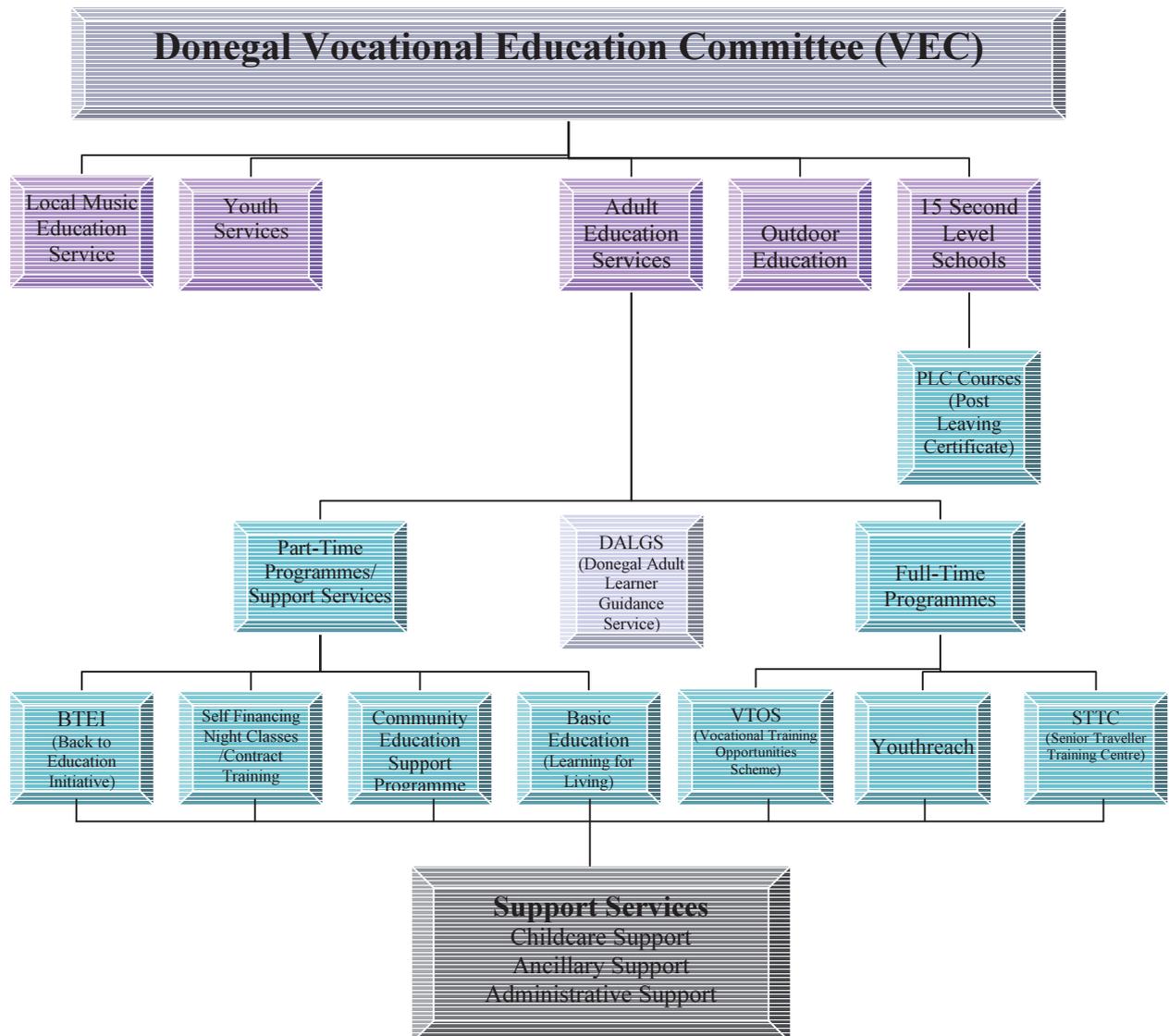


Figure 3.2: Co Donegal VEC's (Adult) Education & Service Provision

3.1 Values, Vision & Mission

As outlined in the Adult Education Service Strategic Plan 2005-2009, the Service supports the development of a lifelong learning culture in the county and is committed to continually improving the quality of teaching and learning in order to widen participation among adult students. The Service recognises that a diversity of adult educational provision is both available and desirable, and that all partners involved in this provision will not have the same level of resources available to them. It is a central belief of the Service that adults learn best when:

- They are comfortable and in an informal, friendly environment
- Their experience is valued
- What they learn is useful to their lives
- What and how they learn is negotiated and relevant to their needs
- There is respect between student and tutor and vice versa
- There is good interaction between students and tutors and participation is encouraged
- They are encouraged and supported to succeed and progress in their learning
- The learning process is stimulating
- They are enjoying their learning

The core values of the Adult Education Service therefore focus on:

- Inclusiveness
- Adult focus
- Educational provision and progression
- Partnership
- Community
- Targeting of resources
- Professionalism¹⁴

Reflecting the values of Co Donegal VEC and the challenges facing the Adult Education Service in the county, the **vision** for Adult Education Service is ‘to excel in the provision and support of person centred and community oriented adult lifelong learning.’¹⁵ Its **mission** is ‘to offer accessible, inclusive and holistic learning opportunities which will enable adults to empower themselves to reach their full potential’¹⁶ which reflects that of Co Donegal VEC.

¹⁴ County Donegal Vocational Education Committee. *Adult Education Service Strategic Plan 2005-2009*. Letterkenny: Co Donegal VEC, 2005, pp.46-47

¹⁵ Ibid. p.49

¹⁶ Ibid.

3.2 Programmes & Services

3.2.1 Basic Education

The Basic Education Service was established in 1988. Since 2000 it has operated under the umbrella of the Learning for Living programme. During this time the service has expanded rapidly and now caters for approximately over 3,000 students annually. The programme aims to ensure that all adults who need to improve their basic skills have access to high quality education provision. In order to realise this aim, the programme acknowledges:

- the adult status of the student and approaches provision with this in mind
- that the work of the programme needs to encompass aspects of personal development i.e. social, economic and emotional
- that adults need to be active and not just passive students
- that continual self-evaluation and striving for quality will ensure that new initiatives will be developed to meet changing needs

The programme is located in a varying range of centres around the county including AETCs, schools, family resource centres, community centres etc. Courses offered include:

- Essential Skills
- Communications for the Workplace
- English and Communications
- Maths
- Irish Language and Literacy
- Basic Computers
- Personal and Interpersonal Skills
- Junior Certificate English and Maths
- Family Learning
- Workplace Basic Education

FETAC and State Examination Commission (SEC) Certification is offered.

3.2.2 BTEI

The Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) provides part-time further education programmes for young people and adults. It began in late 2002 and has since expanded rapidly as its flexible approach has allowed people to combine a return to learning with family, work and other responsibilities. Tuition is free to any adult with less than upper second level education and to those in receipt of a social welfare payment or medical card and their dependants. Individuals in employment who have attained upper second level education are charged fees.

The BTEI provision in Co Donegal VEC operates under the following strands:

- *Centre-based model:* This model is based in the six AETCs and complements the existing programmes in operation. Courses under the centre-based strand include:
 - Junior Certificate
 - Leaving Certificate
 - Childcare
 - Care in the Community
 - Computer Applications
 - Personal Effectiveness
 - Mathematics
 - Communications
- *Community-based model:* Part-time accredited courses are provided through community organisations and groups to those with few qualifications. The ethos of the programme is one of engaging with educationally disadvantaged adults and has a social inclusion focus. The Community Education Facilitator liaises with groups, who decide on their own courses, based on the community need. This creates a sense of ownership by participants (bottom-up approach) and enables a wide geographical spread with flexible timing.

Certification is offered for all programmes from a range of awarding bodies including DES, ECDL, FETAC and OCR/RSA.

3.2.3 VTOS

VTOS consists of a range of courses designed to meet the educational and training needs of unemployed people and to prepare them to go to paid employment or onto further education and training opportunities leading to paid employment. VTOS is open to students aged 21 years and over who have been in receipt of one of the following for at least six months (156 days): Jobseeker's Assistance; Jobseeker's Benefit; One-

Parent Family Payment; Illness Allowance; Illness Benefit; Credits; Dependent Spouse; Blind Person's Pension; Deserted Wife's Allowance; Deserted Wife's Benefit; Prisoner's Wife's Allowance; Widow/Widower's Contributory Pension; Widow/Widower's Non-Contributory Pension. Courses take place five days a week over two years in the six AETCs across the county. A range of certification is offered including Leaving Certificate and FETAC Levels 3, 4 and 5 in Computer Applications, Childcare and Community Care.

In Co Donegal VTOS is located in the six AETCs as follows:

Ballyshannon	18
Buncrana	30
Gortahork	15
Donegal Town	30
Letterkenny	72
Milford	15
Total Places	180

Table 3.2: Co Donegal VEC VTOS Places per AETC

3.2.4 Youthreach

Youthreach is the Department of Education and Science's national programme for early school leavers, aged 16-20 years. Its aim is to holistically develop the core skills needed for further learning and to prepare young people to progress to further education/training or to employment. Youthreach centres are managed and administered locally by the VECs and funded by the DES and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DETE) with the assistance of the European Social Fund (ESF). In 2004 Youthreach centres became designated centres for education under the Department of Education and Science.

Courses are full-time, of 35 hours duration per week and are available on a year round basis over 226 days per year and offer a wide range of certified (FETAC Level 3 and 4, OCR, Safe Pass, OCN, ECDL etc) and non-certified subjects, depending on which centre is attended. Participants normally undertake a Youthreach programme for up to two years. Students receive a training allowance, meal allowance, travel allowance (where applicable – almost all centres have their own bus allowing them to collect and

return students to and from the centre where necessary) and childcare allowance (where applicable).

There are seven Youthreach centres in Co Donegal, the first of which opened in 1989, providing a total of 160 places throughout the county in both the AETCs and outreach centres as follows:

Ballyshannon (AETC)	25
Buncrana (AETC)	25
Glengad	13
Gortahork (AETC)	25
Killybegs	10
Letterkenny	40
Lifford	22
Total Places	160

Table 3.3: Co Donegal VEC Youthreach Places

3.2.5 Senior Traveller Training Centre (STTC)

The STTC provides basic compensatory education for Travellers over 18 years of age. It is based in the Centre for Education, Kilmacrennan Road, Letterkenny and has 39 places. The aim of the centre is to provide Travellers with the knowledge, skills and attitudes required to successfully make the transition to work and adult life, and to participate fully in their communities. Like Youthreach, STTCs are managed and administered locally by the VECs and funded by the DES and the DETE with ESF assistance. In 2004 STTCs became designated centres for education under the Department of Education and Science.

The programme is full-time, of 35 hours duration per week and places are available on a year round basis over 209 days. Participants normally attend the programme for up to two years. Students receive a training allowance, meal allowance, travel allowance where applicable and childcare allowance (where applicable). Like the Youthreach programme, the STTC offers a wide range of certified (FETAC Level 3 and 4, Junior Certificate, OCR, Safe Pass, OCN, ECDL etc) and non-certified subjects. The STTC is supported in its work by a Board of Management.

3.2.6 IT Training Centre

Co Donegal VEC runs a dedicated Information Technology Training Centre in Letterkenny. This centre provides IT training for groups and individuals looking to develop or improve their computer skills and earn certification. Courses are available both day and evening to suit the needs of the client. Certification is offered from ECDL Ireland (Core and Advanced), FÁS IAS, OCR/RSA, Pitman, City & Guilds and FETAC.

The IT Centre provides training for all adults. However the majority of students are unemployed adults that access training through FÁS courses. Clients include FÁS, Health Service Executive (HSE), Co Donegal VEC, DLDC and local community organisations.

The IT Training Centre has diversified its training portfolio. It now provides not just IT Training but training in different disciplines such as Childcare, Stone Building, Pre-Apprenticeship Healthcare and Community Care. The centre is now a major provider of Manual Handling training (Safe Moving & Handling) in the north-west region.

The centre is also one of the few places that provides a specialised training course for people with disabilities. This year long programme is funded by FÁS and provides IT training along with additional modules such as communications skills, career development and work experience.

3.2.7 Self-Financing Night Classes

Night classes are self-financing courses which take place throughout the county in the AETCs and schools, usually one night per week for two hours over eight weeks. They cover a range of subject areas such as art, languages, IT, yoga, childcare etc. and begin in the autumn and spring. They are strictly for adults over 18 years of age.

3.2.8 Community Education Support Programme

The Community Education Support Programme supports low cost, locally based educational opportunities for educationally disadvantaged adults. Priority is given to innovative educational activities which encourage personal development or involvement

in community development. Assistance is provided to design a programme, find a tutor and pay for tutors' fees and other associated costs. Courses funded include series' of classes, 'taster' workshops in different subjects, short training courses, community based educational projects. Funding is allocated on the merits of individual applications. Community education groups are also facilitated to deliver Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) programmes in their own area. Other supports provided to Community Education Groups include networking/information sharing activities and training programmes for adult tutors.

3.2.8.1 Mobile I.T. Unit

The Mobile I.T. Unit is a set of twelve fully integrated laptop computers with printing facilities. The Unit travels throughout Donegal to provide Information Technology training to community groups. The group is required to provide the building, with tables and chairs, for the training to be held and is responsible for the opening and closing of the venue. Light, heat, rental and internet connections are also the responsibility of the community group. The unit travels to an area for one session (2 hours duration) per week for an eight-week period. The Mobile I.T. Unit tutor travels, sets up and disassembles the unit in the building each week.

3.2.9 Adult Learner Guidance Service

The Donegal Adult Learner Guidance Service (DALGS) is a support service that helps adults to explore their skills, interests and goals in life, to identify the educational and vocational opportunities available to them and to decide what steps they need to take in order to achieve their potential. DALGS offers information, advice and guidance tailored to the needs of those on the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS), the Back to Education Initiative (BTEI), the Basic Education programme (Learning for Living), those on courses funded by the Community Education Support programme and those referred by the Education Finance Board. A one-to-one service is also offered for self-referring clients from the general public and for organisational referrals from other support services. The service was established in Letterkenny in January 2002 under the second phase of the Adult Education Guidance Initiative (AEGI) and was expanded in 2005 with the establishment of a second guidance centre in Donegal Town with funding

from the Department of Social and Family Affairs (DSFA) and Údarás na Gaeltachta; the guidance counsellor post in this centre has since received core funding from DES. The Service also offers a limited one-to-one outreach service in Bunrana, St Johnston, Downings, Gortahork, Dungloe, Kilcar and Ballyshannon.

DALGS has a particular focus on those most disadvantaged by the formal education system.

4. OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

4.1 Co Donegal

The socio-economic profile of the county is examined under a number of headings namely population, household composition, employment and unemployment and education as these are of particular interest to the functioning of the Adult Education Service. As outlined in section 2, the statistical information has largely been drawn from the 2006 Census of Population and supplemented where possible by more current information drawn mainly from newspaper articles. It should be noted however, that due to the research limitations also outlined in section 2, it was not possible to provide an in-depth analysis of the County. Nevertheless, the depth of the analysis provided here is considered to be of sufficient detail to inform the current and future operations of the Service.

▪ Overview

County Donegal is the most northerly county on the island of Ireland and the fourth largest county containing the largest Gaeltacht area in the country. It is predominantly a rural county, covering some 486,091 hectares (or 1,193,621 acres¹⁷) or 6.9% of the total land area of the Republic and has the longest coastline in the country, covering some 1,134 km or 17.1% of the national coastline. Nationally, Co Donegal is part of what is known as the BMW (Border, Midlands and West) region. Its unique geographical location, 'determined by political factors in the early part of the twentieth century...succeeded in severing much of the county from its natural hinterland...[which] led to considerable suffering and isolation on the part of the county which is still visible today.'¹⁸ Its unique geography in terms of its sheer size, distance from the seat of government and connection to the rest of the Republic by only ten kilometres of land has been a strong influence in shaping Co Donegal VEC's education and training provision, particularly that of the Adult Education Service which operates much of its

¹⁷ Beattie, S. *Donegal. (Ireland in Old Photographs)*. Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing, 2004, p.5

¹⁸ Buchanan, S. (Ed.) *Coiste Gairmoideachais Chontae Dhún na nGall 1905-2005. Súil Siar, Ceiliúradh, Múnú na Todhchaí / County Donegal Vocational Education Committee 1905-2005. Reflecting, Celebrating, Shaping the Future*. Letterkenny: Co Donegal VEC, 2005, p.1. In terms of this suffering and isolation, research conducted in 2005 confirmed the county as having the highest poverty rate in the country (see Watson, D., Whelan, C. T., Williams, J. and Blackwell, S. *Mapping Poverty: National, Regional and County Patterns*. Dublin: Institute of Public Administration/Combat Poverty Agency, 2005 (Combat Poverty Agency Research Series, No. 37))

provision on an outreach basis, thus requiring innovation and entrepreneurship in service design.

▪ **Population**

Despite growing at a slower rate than the rest of the country between 2002 and 2006, the 2006 Census of Population showed that the county's population has increased since the previous Census in 2002 from 137,575 persons¹⁹ to 147,264²⁰, an increase of 7% (or 13.3% in the decade from 1996-2006²¹). It is predicted to increase to 158,190 by 2012.²²

Analysis by the Research & Policy Centre of Donegal County Council (DCC) reveals that in terms of urban towns, Letterkenny experienced a massive population increase, rising by 15.5% in this same period (2002-2006).²³ Moreover, the three largest urban populations in the county in terms of aggregate town areas²⁴ are residing in Letterkenny Town and Environs (48.1%), Buncrana and Environs (16.2%) and Ballybofey-Stranorlar (11.4%), followed by Ballyshannon (7.3%), Donegal (6.4%), Bundoran (5.4%) and Carndonagh (5.3%).²⁵ However, further analysis reveals that County Donegal had a higher percentage of its population living in aggregate rural areas (75.2%) than in aggregate urban areas (24.8%), compared with 39.3% and 60.7% nationally.²⁶ The larger populations within the county are found in the north-east, with the south-west characterised by lower populations.

¹⁹ Central Statistics Office. *Census 2002: Principal Socio-Economic Results*. Dublin: The Stationary Office, 2003, p.50

²⁰ Central Statistics Office. *Census 2006: Principal Socio-Economic Results*. Dublin: The Stationary Office, 2007, p.59

²¹ Donegal County Council. *Factsheet No. 2 - Population Patterns In Donegal, In The Border Region And Nationally Draft Tables*. Lifford: Research & Policy Centre, 2008(c). Table 1: Growth in the County Population of Designated Gateway Areas (National Spatial Strategy - NSS), 1996 – 2006

²² Donegal County Council. *Factsheet No. 1 - Principal Demographic Results 2006*. Lifford: Research & Policy Centre, 2008(a). This is based on the application of the CSO Medium Scenario Growth Model. It should be noted that 'population projections for the purposes of the Housing Strategy are derived from the "Regional Population Projections 2006–2021" published in May 2005 by the Central Statistics Office. These projections predict that the border counties will sustain an average annual population increase of 1.2% up to 2021. This projection is based on the M1F2 Medium Scenario Model which largely assumes a continuation of recent demographic trends.' Ibid.

²³ Donegal County Council. *Op. cit.*, 2008(c) *Table 2: Growth in Population of the Actual Designated Gateway Areas (NSS), 1996 – 2006*.

²⁴ The population in the Aggregate Town Area is defined as those persons living in population clusters of 1,500 or more inhabitants. For this purpose a town with a legally defined boundary is classified on the basis of its total population including any suburbs or environs.

²⁵ Donegal County Council. *Factsheet No. 2 - Population Patterns In Donegal, In The Border Region And Nationally*. Lifford: Research & Policy Centre, 2008(b).

²⁶ Ibid.

In addition 23,783 persons were residing in the Gaeltacht area in 2006, representing 25% of Ireland's total Gaeltacht population, the majority of which were in the Glenties area (20,576 persons or 85%).²⁷ Moreover, the population of County Donegal's islands grew by 7.0% over the period 2002-2006, a growth far higher than that of the state. The main growth was on the islands of Inis Bó Finne, Oileán an Bhráighe, Inis Fraoigh and Toraigh.²⁸

The 2006 Census also revealed that the county has a higher percentage of young people and older people than the State at 22.7% of the population in the 0-14 age band compared to 20.4% nationally and 12.5% of the population aged 65 years and over compared to 11.0% nationally. This means that the county has a higher age dependency rate at 35.2% compared to 33.3% nationally.²⁹ County Donegal also has a lower percentage than the State of those considered 'Working Age' (15 - 65 years of age) at 65.6% compared to 69.5%.³⁰

▪ **Household Composition**

The 2006 Census of Population revealed that 12.4% of private households in County Donegal are headed by a lone parent which is higher than the national average of 11.6%. County Donegal has a higher percentage of households headed by a lone mother than in the State (10.6% compared to 9.9%), while it has 1.7% of households headed by a lone father which is similar to that of the State.³¹

²⁷ Ibid. Moreover, 'it is important to bear in mind that Gaeltacht boundaries and Electoral Division boundaries do not always fit neatly and that part or the whole of an electoral division might be classified as a Gaeltacht area as defined by the Gaeltacht Area Orders, 1956 to 1982. Gaeltacht areas fall into 49 electoral divisions in County Donegal.' (Ibid.)

²⁸ Donegal County Council. Op. cit., 2008(a)

²⁹ An age dependent population is defined as the total population who are termed dependent that is those persons aged under 15 years of age and those aged 65 years and over, expressed as a percentage of the total population. Donegal County Council. *Factsheet No. 3 - Age and Marital Status of the Population of County Donegal*. Lifford: Research & Policy Centre, 2008(d)

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Donegal County Council. *Factsheet No. 4 – The Composition of Households and Families in Donegal*. Lifford: Research & Policy Centre, 2008(e)

▪ **Employment & Unemployment**

In 2006 49.8% of those aged fifteen years and over (56,670 persons) were at work in Co Donegal, compared to 57.2% nationally.³² Further analysis reveals that 57.8% of males (32,827 out of 56,788 persons) aged fifteen years were at work, compared to 66% nationally, while 41.8% of females (23,843 out of 57,050 persons) aged fifteen years and over were at work compared to 48.5% nationally.³³ Moreover, analysis by the DCC Research and Policy Centre shows the main employment sectors in the county, in terms of the number of persons at work were ranked as follows (Table 4.1):

Ranking: Co Donegal	Employment Sector	% of the Workforce	Ranking: State
1	Construction	14.3%	3
2	Wholesale & Retail	13.6%	1
3	Health & Social Work	12%	4
4	Manufacturing Industries	11%	2
5	Education	8.2%	7
6	Hotels & Restaurants	6.8%	9
7	Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing	6.7%	10

Table 4.1: Employment Sector Rankings 2006 – Co Donegal v. State³⁴

Further analysis reveals a slightly different picture in terms of the main employment sectors in each of the seven main towns in the county:

- Letterkenny Health & Social Work
- Buncrana Construction
- Ballybofey-Stranorlor Construction
- Ballyshannon Wholesale & Retail Trade
- Donegal Town Hotels & Restaurants
- Bundoran Hotels & Restaurants
- Carndonagh Construction³⁵

In terms of socio-economic groupings, the 2006 Census revealed that of those who were employed in the county, the largest category were those in the non-manual working category at 18.5% (compared to 19.3% nationally), followed by

³² Central Statistics Office. Op. cit., 2007, p.38 (Table 4A. Persons Aged 15 Years and Over in Each Province, County and City, Classified by Principal Economic Status)

³³ Ibid., p.39 (Table 4B. Males Aged 15 Years and Over in Each Province, County and City, Classified by Principal Economic Status) and p.40 (Table 4C. Females Aged 15 Years and Over in Each Province, County and City, Classified by Principal Economic Status)

³⁴ Donegal County Council. *Factsheet No. 6 – Employment & Unemployment, and Type of Industries & Occupations*. Lifford: Research & Policy Centre, 2008(f)

³⁵ Ibid.

employers/managers at 12.7% (compared to 15.3% nationally). The smallest category was higher professionals at 3.4% (compared to 5.78% nationally). It is also interesting to note that 15.3% of workers fell into the semi-skilled (10.1%) and unskilled (5.3%) categories compared to 12.1% nationally (8.4% semi-skilled and 3.8% unskilled). County Donegal also has a higher number of farmers (5.4%) than the state (3.9%) and agricultural workers (1% compared to 0.6%).³⁶

While the unemployment rate in the county had declined somewhat since the 2002 Census, unfortunately the county's ranking as having the highest unemployment rate nationally was maintained in 2006 at 12.9%, compared to 8.5% nationally (down from 15.6% in 2002).³⁷ Further analysis illustrates the depth of the unemployment levels around the county in urban terms (Table 4.2):

Town	Total in Labour Force	Labour Force Participation Rate %	Total Not in Labour Force	Unemployment Rate %
Letterkenny	8639	63.2%	5028	13.0%
Buncrana	2595	58.3%	1853	14.4%
Ballybofey-Stranorlar	1876	56.8%	1424	11.2%
Ballyshannon	1187	55.0%	971	10.7%
Donegal	1121	57.3%	835	9.9%
Bundoran	886	55.8%	703	13.3%
Carndonagh	739	50.3%	731	15.6%

Table 4.2: Total Persons aged 15 years and over in each town with a population of 1,500 or more in County Donegal, classified by labour force participation and unemployment rates, 2006³⁸

However, the positive aspect of these figures was that within this age cohort less of those in the lower age groups were unemployed compared to the national level. However, more of those in the older age groups were unemployed compared to national levels as Table 4.3 illustrates:

³⁶ Central Statistics Office. Op. cit., 2007, p.59 (Table 15A. Persons in Each Province, County and City Classified by Socio-Economic Group)

³⁷ Donegal County Council. Op. cit, 2008(f)

³⁸ Donegal County Council. *Factsheet No. 6 – Employment & Unemployment, and Type of Industries & Occupations Tables*. Lifford: Research & Policy Centre, 2008(g) (Table 2)

Area	Total	Age Group					
		15-19	20-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55 years & over
Donegal (number)	7,265	339	883	1,564	1,581	1,607	1,291
Donegal (%)	100.0%	4.7%	12.2%	21.5%	21.8%	22.1%	17.8%
State (number)	150,084	8,291	21,993	40,278	31,388	28,343	19,791
State (%)	100.0%	5.5%	14.7%	26.8%	20.9%	18.9%	13.2%

Table 4.3: Unemployed persons males and females (excluding first time job seekers) aged 15 years and over in County Donegal and the State, classified by age group, 2006³⁹

Nevertheless, the current unemployment situation is quite grim nationally and locally which will have serious implications not only for Co Donegal but for the work of Co Donegal VEC's Adult Education Service. According to the DCC's Research and Policy Centre:

For the first seven months of 2008, a total of 20,392 persons have been laid off work in the State, which is 36% more than for the first seven months of 2007... a larger number of females lost their job this year while over half of the redundancies were in predominately male sectors of construction and manufacturing. In July of this year, 3914 workers have been laid off work. The total number of persons on the live register in July 2008 was 226,000 of which 10,600 persons joined the live register between June and July of this year, which translated into 342 persons joining the register on a daily basis. The monthly change shows that 3,800 females came onto the live register compared to 6,700 males... 14.3% of total persons at work in County Donegal are employed in the construction industry with a fifth of all our households being constructed post 2001, [this] would indicate that *if these trends are translated down to county level Donegal will be particularly hard hit in 2008.*⁴⁰

This reality has already been borne out. In the last year, to November 2008, 5,429 people signed on the Live Register in Co Donegal, an approximate increase of 38.54%, bringing unemployment levels up to 14,090 in the county.⁴¹ In December 2008 15,264 people in the county were signing on, an increase of 67% in the year, compared to December 2007.⁴² This equates approximately to 10.37% of the county's population⁴³ which means that Co Donegal as a whole already far exceeds current (8.3% in

³⁹ Ibid. (Table 11)

⁴⁰ Donegal County Council. Op. cit., 2008, Emphasis added.

⁴¹ Central Statistics Office. *Liver Register Additional Tables November 2008*. www.cso.ie, accessed 08 December 2008 (Table 3: Persons on the Live Register Classified by Sex, Age Group and Local Office of Registration). See also Dowds, D. '2,766 on the Dole in Inishowen', <http://www.inishowennews.com> (09 September 2008), accessed 23 October 2008. In Inishowen, for example 2,766 people were signing on the live register in August with 972 more people signing on in August 2008 compared to August 2007, an increase of 54%. (Ibid.)

⁴² Doherty, D. 'Another Startling Rise in Unemployment Figures' in *Donegal Democrat*, 15 January 2009

⁴³ Based on 2006 Census of Population figures.

December 2008) and predicted (9.4% in 2009 by the ESRI) national unemployment rates. However, the situation is much more serious in particular pockets of the county. In the Inishowen peninsula for example, 2,979 people were signing on in October 2008 which was the highest monthly total since December 1998. Disturbingly, 'it represents a massive 84% increase on October 2007. Nationally the year-on-year increase is 60%, while the county wide increase is 58%'.⁴⁴ Worryingly this upward trend looks set to continue for the foreseeable future.

These high unemployment rates are coupled with a high dependency on social welfare payments in the county. Research by the DSFA in 2004 showed that nearly 41,000 people were claiming social welfare payments at the end of June 2004, 'creating a recipient/beneficiary ratio over the whole range of social welfare payments of 1:1.62. The total number of people in County Donegal depending in whole or in part on a weekly social welfare payment was approximately 66,300 people or 48% of the total population [in 2004].'⁴⁵ While it was not possible to access more comprehensive data on welfare dependency rates, viewed in light of the information above, the seriousness of the situation is fairly clear.

▪ **Education**

The 2006 Census revealed that Co Donegal contained the highest percentage of those aged 15 years and over who had finished school at under 15 years at 20.7% (20,414 of 98,673 persons) compared to 11.3% nationally, with the next highest county being Monaghan at 15.8%.⁴⁶ This consisted of 22.8% males and 18.5% females.⁴⁷ The county also contained the highest percentage of those aged 15 years and over who had finished school at 15 years at 9.8% (9,668 of 98,673 persons) compared to 6.7% nationally, with the next county again being Monaghan at 8.8%.⁴⁸ This also consisted of 10.8% males and 8.7% females.⁴⁹ Overall this represented a decrease from the 2002

⁴⁴ Dowds, D. 'Live Register Jumps by 84%' in *Inishowen Independent*, 11 November 2008

⁴⁵ Department of Enterprise, Trade & Employment. *Report of the Interdepartmental Group on Donegal*. Dublin: DETE, 2006, p.8

⁴⁶ Central Statistics Office. *Op. cit.*, 2007, p.67 (Table 19A. Persons Aged 15 Years and Over in Each Province, County and City Classified by Age at Which Full-Time Education Ceased)

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.68-69 (Table 19B. Males Aged 15 Years and Over in Each Province, County and City Classified by Age at Which Full-Time Education Ceased and Table 19C. Females Aged 15 Years and Over in Each Province, County and City Classified by Age at Which Full-Time Education Ceased)

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.67

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.68-69

levels of 22.7% (under 15 years) and 10.9% (15 years).⁵⁰ Further analysis reveals that of those persons whose full-time education had ceased upon leaving school at under 15 years of age, the highest percentage resided in Buncrana (17%), followed by Ballybofey-Stranorlar (16.8%), Carndonagh (14.8%), Donegal Town (14%), Letterkenny (12%) and Bundoran (7.1%).⁵¹

In terms of highest levels of education completed the situation is just as stark. In 2006 Co Donegal once again ranked highest in the State in terms of those aged 15 years and over who had completed their education at primary level (including no formal education) at 28.9% compared to 18.0% nationally, with the next county being Cavan at 24.3%.⁵² This consisted of 31.2% males and 26.5% females.⁵³ However, it did represent a decrease from the 2002 level of 32.2%.⁵⁴

Regarding other educational attainment levels, of those who had ceased full-time education, 23.1% had completed their education at lower secondary level compared to 20.1% nationally, while 22.9% had completed upper secondary education compared to 28.2% nationally.⁵⁵ Again, both sets of statistics represented decreases on the 2002 levels of 24.3% compared to 21.6% nationally (lower secondary level) and 21.5% compared to 27.6% nationally (upper secondary level).⁵⁶ In terms of third level education, attainment levels in County Donegal are lower than the State levels. In 2006 9.4% of those who had ceased their full-time education had done so at the non-degree third level compared to 10.6% nationally, while 12.5% had completed their full-time education at degree or higher level compared to 18.5% nationally.⁵⁷

The educational landscape of the county was further considered by the Interdepartmental Group on Donegal. Its 2006 report discusses research carried out by

⁵⁰ Central Statistics Office. Op. cit., 2003, p.66 (Table 18A. Persons Aged 15 Years and Over in Each Province, County and City Classified by Age at Which Full-Time Education Ceased)

⁵¹ Donegal County Council. *Factsheet No. 7 – Education Levels and Qualifications in Donegal*. Lifford: Research & Policy Centre, 2008(h)

⁵² Central Statistics Office. Op. cit., 2007, p.70 (Table 20A. Persons Aged 15 Years and Over in Each Province, County and City Classified by Highest Level of Education Completed)

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp.71-72 (Table 20B. Males Aged 15 Years and Over in Each Province, County and City Classified by Highest Level of Education Completed and Table 20C. Females Aged 15 Years and Over in Each Province, County and City Classified by Highest Level of Education Completed)

⁵⁴ Central Statistics Office. Op. cit., 2003, p.69 (Table 19A. Persons Aged 15 Years and Over in Each Province, County and City Classified by Age Classified by Highest Level of Education Completed)

⁵⁵ Central Statistics Office. Op. cit., 2007, p.70

⁵⁶ Central Statistics Office. Op. cit., 2003, p.69

⁵⁷ Central Statistics Office. Op. cit., 2007, p.70

Social and Family Support Service (SFSS) Facilitators which highlighted 'a consistent pattern of under-education and lack of skills training among the unemployed.'⁵⁸ This research, which was based on a sample of 1,616 interviews in the county, revealed a disturbing picture. It is therefore worth quoting the report at length:

The results show almost 70% were early school leavers with only 13% having progressed beyond the secondary cycle. This high instance of early school leaving corresponds with the Task Force's findings with the redundant workers, 69% of whom were early school leavers. However while it could be expected that older claimants would have lower formal educational attainments, 64% of under 40s had left school early, and 56% of under 25s were early school leavers. Of these under 25s, over 50% had not obtained a Junior Certificate. While 1,084 of the interviewees (67%) had left school early and, therefore, could be expected to have some degree of literacy or numeracy difficulties, only 158 (10%) admitted to a literacy issue, with the majority of these not wishing to be referred to the VEC adult literacy service. Indications are that this preponderance of low educational achievement has a gender basis, which is mirrored in the population at large. Approximately 73% of males were early school leavers compared with 46% of females, approx 13% of males had leaving certificate standard compares with 30% of females, and only 10% of males had attended 3rd level compared to 22% of females.⁵⁹

Clearly, therefore, despite the fact that overall the 2006 educational attainment Census figures represent a general improvement on the 2002 levels, they nevertheless present the Service with a considerable challenge over the coming years in terms of service provision for those who are, in the main, educationally disadvantaged.

▪ **Conclusion**

The operational context within which Co Donegal VEC's Adult Education Service functions in terms of the county is not an easy one. As a border county, it stubbornly remains one of the most disadvantaged counties in the country, clearly suffering from a range of long-term structural problems. While the county continuously strives to improve its structural environment, the preceding analysis has painted a bleak picture in terms of low educational attainment levels, high unemployment, higher lone parent household compositions, increasing population growth and high dependency ratios all of which give rise to considerable educational disadvantage and an above average rate of poverty. Indeed, in 2005 Donegal had the highest poverty risk in the country at 60-70%

⁵⁸ Department of Enterprise, Trade & Employment. *Report of the Interdepartmental Group on Donegal*. Dublin: DETE, 2006, p.10

⁵⁹ Ibid. The redundant workers referred to are those from the likes of Hospira in Donegal Town which announced it was closing in August 2005 with the lose of 560 jobs.

above the national average and the highest modified consistent poverty rate in the country at 1.9 times above the average.⁶⁰ This is particularly relevant when one considers that poverty 'is a structural rather than a spatial phenomenon. It arises from socio-economic processes such as unemployment and low-paid work, low educational attainment, old age, child dependency and lone parenthood.'⁶¹

The persistent problem of low levels of educational attainment in general and markedly amongst the male population is particularly problematic. The Donegal Employment Initiative Task Force identified this as a major issue for many of the 4,000 workers made redundant since 1999 from the textile industry throughout the county.⁶² It now appears to once again be one of the major issues for those thousands losing their jobs across many sectors, particularly the construction industry.

While Co Donegal and its people are vibrant, innovative and entrepreneurial, the structural deficiencies which the county suffers from are considerable. With increasing unemployment rates and a difficult economic environment ahead, Co Donegal VEC's Adult Education Service faces a serious challenge in the coming years which must be kept to the forefront of any future service planning.

4.2 Co Donegal VEC

Co Donegal VEC is the fourth largest of thirty-three VECs in the country and celebrated its 100th anniversary of educational services delivery in 2005. It employs approximately 1,800 staff, making it one of the largest employers in Co Donegal, of which approximately 400 (22.23%) worked for the Adult Education Service in 2007. As well as the Adult Education Service, it is also responsible for fifteen second-level schools, outdoor education provision through Gartan Outdoor Education Centre (OEC), youth services and a music education service: in 2007 almost 28,000 students availed of its

⁶⁰ Watson, D. *et al.* Op. cit., 2005 (Combat Poverty Agency Research Series, No. 37), pp.69-70. 'Modified consistent poverty (MCP) is defined as households below 60% of the mean equivalised household income (using the NSHQ income measure) and experiencing basic deprivation, i.e. lacking one or more of the items in the basic deprivation index.' Ibid., p.69

⁶¹ Ibid., p.xxxiv

⁶² Department of Enterprise, Trade & Employment. Op. cit., 2006, p.7

programmes and services.⁶³ The work of the VEC is funded, in the main, by the Department of Education and Science and supported and managed by Financial Services, Corporate Services and the Human Resource Division in its Administrative Offices in Letterkenny. Figure 4.1 illustrates the organisational structure of Co Donegal VEC. The VEC's work is governed by the VEC (Amendment) Act, 2001⁶⁴ which provides for both a reserved and an executive functioning of its day-to-day work. It has twenty-three members, consisting of:

- 9 members elected by the County Council
- 6 Urban Council members (two each from Buncrana, Bundoran and Letterkenny)
- 2 staff representatives
- 2 parents representatives
- 4 members appointed by the County Council from among persons nominated (from advertising)

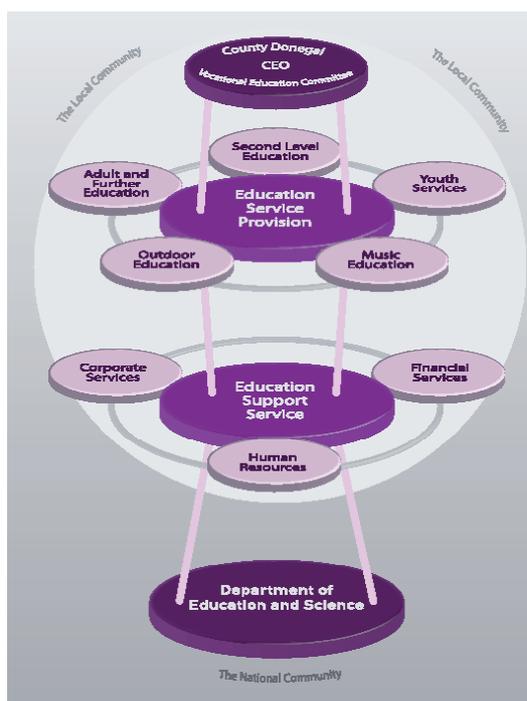


Figure 4.1: Organisational Structure of Co Donegal VEC⁶⁵

⁶³ County Donegal Vocational Education Committee. *Annual Report 2007*. Letterkenny: Co Donegal VEC, 2008, p.8. This figure breaks down as 4,359 through second-level, 14,182 through Adult Education Services, 7,600 through Gartan OEC and 1,133 through the Music Education Partnership.

⁶⁴ This reformed and updated the Vocational Education Act, 1930.

⁶⁵ County Donegal Vocational Education Committee. *Op. cit.*, 2008, p.6

4.3 Policy Context

The last decade has witnessed the introduction of a huge amount of national legislation affecting the work of VECs on a daily basis. In addition a range of new local policies and strategies have also impacted on day-to-day operations. While it is not the place of this review to examine these in detail, some of this legislation, strategies and policies has a particular bearing on the day-to-day work of the Adult Education Service and these will briefly be examined here.⁶⁶

4.3.1 National Policy Context

▪ **Legislation**

The **Education Act, 1998** provides for the regulation of all recognised schools and centres for education. This is important in the context of the Adult Education Service because Youthreach centres and the STTC are deemed to be recognised centres for education. The Act states that there is a statutory duty on the Minister to ensure that appropriate education and support services are available to everyone, including every person with a disability or other special educational needs. It also states that schools must use their resources to ensure that the educational needs of all students are identified and provided for.

The purpose of the **Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999** was to establish an administrative structure for the development, recognition and award of education/training qualifications in the State. The Act established the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI), the agency responsible for developing a national framework of qualifications. It also established the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) and the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC). Each Council is the awarding body for its sector and has responsibility for accreditation within the national framework. The National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) was launched in October 2003.

The **VEC (Amendment) Act, 2001** reforms and updates the Vocational Education Act 1930 and its various amendments. It deals with many alterations to the original 1930 Act in relation to the composition of VECs, organisation of sub-committees, regulation of

⁶⁶ See Appendix 3 for a comprehensive list of legislation relating to Co Donegal VEC.

financial matters and the production of education and service plans along with an annual report. The principal change relates to the introduction of a Reserved and Executive model of governance predicated on the identification and separation of the policy and executive functions of VECs. The policy functions are placed with the governing body of the VEC, the Committee, and the executive functions are vested in the CEO. The CEO is responsible for the administration of the organisation in accordance with the policy parameters adopted by the Committee.

The purpose of the **Teaching Council Act, 2001** is to promote teaching as a profession; to promote the professional development of teachers; to maintain and improve the quality of teaching in the state; to provide for the establishment of standards, policies and procedures for the education and training of teachers and other matters relating to teachers and the teaching profession; to provide for the registration and regulation of teachers and to enhance professional standards and competence; [and] for those purposes to establish the Teaching Council; to provide for the repeal of the Intermediate Education (Ireland) Act, 1914 and to provide for related matters.⁶⁷

- ***Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education, 2000***

Learning for Life was the government's first White Paper on adult education in Ireland. It clarified the role and context of adult education in Ireland which is now defined as systematic learning undertaken by adults who are returning to education. Not all recommendations in the White Paper have acquired legislative status. However, some aspects have been implemented and there has been an increase in funding in many areas.

- ***National Development Plan 2007-2013***⁶⁸

The *National Development Plan* (NDP) 2007-2013 'sets out the roadmap to Ireland's future...[and] integrates strategic development frameworks for regional development, for rural communities, for all-island co-operation, and for protection of the environment with common economic and social goals.'⁶⁹ Its general goals include:

⁶⁷ Teaching Council Act, 2001

⁶⁸ Government of Ireland. *Ireland National Development Plan 2007-2013. Transforming Ireland. A Better Quality of Life for All*. Dublin: The Stationary Office, January 2007

⁶⁹ Ibid., p.15

- Decisively tackle structural infrastructure deficits
- Greatly enhance enterprise development, science, technology and innovation, working age training and skills provision
- Integrate regional development within the National Spatial Strategy framework
- Invest in long-term environmental sustainability
- Realise the opportunities of strengthened all-island collaboration in areas of mutual interest
- Deliver a multi-faceted programme for Social Inclusion⁷⁰
- Provide value for taxpayers' money⁷¹

It should be noted that the implementation of this plan was predicated on the expectation that the Irish economy would 'expand at an average of around 4-4½% per annum over the period 2007-2013. The Plan is affordable on this basis.'⁷² However, in September the Central Bank revised its economic growth forecast for the country for 2008 downwards to 0.3% and 1.8% for 2009⁷³, while in November the European Commission estimated that the euro zone economy would only grow by 0.1% in 2009⁷⁴, thus leaving a question mark over these ambitions.

- ***Towards 2016 - Social Partnership Agreement***⁷⁵

Towards 2016 is the government's seventh social partnership agreement⁷⁶ which sets out a vision of Ireland in the future as agreed between government and the social partners (made up of four pillars: the trade union pillar, the business and employment pillar, the farming pillar and the community and voluntary pillar). Its key foundations are: a dynamic, internationalised, and participatory society and economy, with a strong commitment to social justice, where economic development is environmentally sustainable, and internationally competitive. The shared overall goal of *Towards 2016* is to realise this vision by:

⁷⁰ This includes under the Children Programme: Youthreach (p.246) and the STTC (p.245) and under the Working Age – Education Programme: BTEI (p.248), VTOS (p.249), Adult Literacy (pp.249-250), Adult Guidance (p.250). Community education is also considered within the strategic context of this programme (p.248)

⁷¹ Government of Ireland. Op. cit., 2007, pp.17-18

⁷² Ibid., p.17

⁷³ Tansey, P. 'Central Bank Revises Growth Forecast Downwards' in *The Irish Times*, 01 August 2008

⁷⁴ 'Euro Zone Has Slumped into Recession – EU', www.rte.ie, accessed 03 November 2008

⁷⁵ Government of Ireland. *Towards 2016. Ten Year Framework Social Partnership Agreement 2006-2015*. Dublin: The Stationary Office, June 2006

⁷⁶ The others being 1. Programme for National Recovery 1987 – 1990; 2. Programme for Economic and Social Progress 1991-1994; 3. Programme for Competitiveness & Work (1994); 4. Partnership 2000 (1997-2000); 5. Programme for Prosperity and Fairness (2000-2002) and 6. Sustaining Progress.

- Nurturing the complementary relationship between social policy and economic prosperity;
 - Developing a vibrant, knowledge-based economy;
 - Re-inventing and repositioning Ireland's social policies;
 - Integrating an island-of-Ireland economy, and;
 - Deepening capabilities, achieving higher participation rates and more successfully handling diversity, including immigration.⁷⁷
- ***Tomorrow's Skills: Towards a National Skills Strategy***⁷⁸

In 2007 the fifth report of the Expert Group on Future Skills *Tomorrows Skills* was published.⁷⁹ The Expert Group's priorities are identifying emerging need for policy or structural changes, reviewing the effectiveness and value of operational programmes and delivery systems in place to meet national skills needs, being committed to progressively promote lifelong learning and capitalising on instructive developments internationally. *Tomorrow's Skills*, noted that:

In simple numerical terms, the Irish economy is likely to need 950,000 extra new workers between 2006 and 2020...In absolute terms, the demand for skills at National Framework of Qualification levels 6-10 will continue to grow strongly. *However, in the absence of policy change, a significant proportion of Ireland's workforce will remain low-skilled in 2020, with their highest level of educational attainment below upper secondary level.* The result will be an under-supply of skills at the higher levels, and an over-supply of those at the lower levels. *The skills requirement of the economy will be met only by re-skilling and upskilling the resident workforce and by attracting highly skilled migrants.*⁸⁰

The report therefore proposed that by 2020, '48 percent of the labour force should have qualifications at NFQ Levels 6 to 10; 45 percent should have qualifications at NFQ levels 4 and 5; and the remaining 7 percent will have qualifications at NFQ levels 1 to 3.'⁸¹ Of particular note was the vision of achieving a skilled labour force by 2020 by upskilling those already within the labour force through the 'one-step-up' approach. The

⁷⁷ Government of Ireland. Op. cit, June 2006, p.5

⁷⁸ Expert Group on Future Skills Needs. *Tomorrows Skills. Towards A National Skills Strategy*. Fifth Report. Dublin: Forfás, 2007

⁷⁹ The Expert Group was established in 1997 to advise Government on projected skills requirements at national and sectoral levels and make recommendations on how best to address identified needs; advise Government on associated priority training requirements and the most cost effective ways of responding to them; advise on any skills requirements that cannot be met internally at a given time and so must be met through inward migration; advise on developments in content and delivery systems that support excellence in training quality elsewhere and on adaptations necessary to incorporate such developments into training provision here; respond to any request for advice from the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment on training programmes that are supported through the National Training Fund and ensure that recommendations made are adequately assessed by the relevant and responsible authorities and periodically inform members of the EGFSN of progress made in the implementation of such recommendations (<http://www.skillsireland.ie/about/index.html>, accessed 30 October 2008)

⁸⁰ Expert Group on Future Skills Needs. Op. cit., 2007, p.2 (Foreword). Emphasis added.

⁸¹ Ibid., p.7

report noted that this ‘upskilling will come through a combination of adult education and training.’⁸²

▪ **National Anti-Poverty Strategy**

The *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016* (NAPinclusion) was published in February 2007.⁸³ It adopts a lifecycle approach by setting out a wide range of actions to address social exclusion amongst children, people of working age, older people and people with disabilities, believing that ‘the lifecycle approach places the individual at the centre of policy development and delivery by assessing the risks facing him or her and the supports available at key stages of the lifecycle.’⁸⁴ It also outlines a number of high-level goals in a small number of key areas in order to achieve the overall objective of reducing consistent poverty; these areas include education, income support, employment and participation, community care, housing, health and integration of migrants. Locally, the County Development Board (CDB), of which Co Donegal VEC is a member, is considered a key element in ensuring the delivery of social inclusion across all sectors of society.

▪ **DES Value for Money Reviews**

Value for Money (VFM) Reviews are conducted periodically by government Departments in order to provide a systematic analysis of what is actually being achieved by expenditure in each spending programme and a basis on which more informed decisions can be made on priorities within and between expenditure programmes. In 2005 a Working Group was set up within the DES to review value for money relating to the Youthreach and STTC programmes. This was the first ever VFM review conducted by the DES on any adult and further education programme or service. Its report was published in 2008 and produced twenty-seven key findings and made fifty-two key

⁸² Ibid., p.96

⁸³ The first National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) *Sharing in Progress* was published in 1997 and was the first ten year government plan to reduce poverty. It was revised in 2002 with the publication of *Building an Inclusive Society*. The government’s second National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion (NAPS/Inclusion) was published in 2003 as part of an EU-wide effort to make a decisive impact on poverty by 2010. It incorporates the NAPS. The NAP/inclusion was a two year plan until 2005. Each EU member state published a NAP/inclusion. EU member states are no longer required to prepare on a regular basis a National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion. However, Ireland committed itself to preparing a new National Action Plan for Social Inclusion - *NAPinclusion 2007-2016*.

⁸⁴ Government of Ireland. *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016*. Dublin: The Stationary Office, 2007, p.21

recommendations.⁸⁵ While it is not possible to discuss these here, some of the key findings are particularly relevant in the context of this review. Firstly it stated that:

Notwithstanding the exceptional economic success that Ireland has enjoyed over the last decade, a number of disadvantaged groups remain (including early school leavers and Travellers) and their needs are recognised in the national policy context.⁸⁶

In terms of Youthreach the review found that ‘the potential customer base for Youthreach...significantly outstrips the current level of places available nationally’⁸⁷, while in terms of the STTC programme it found that:

as participation rates for Travellers increase at post-primary and as the programme in the future concentrates on adults (age 18+) the need for this positive action should diminish and over the next 10-15 years the programmes should have merged into mainstream Further Education provision. In the long term (15 years) there should be no segregated provision for adults.⁸⁸

In terms of both programmes the review argued that:

On the basis of the analysis carried out, the Working Group is in agreement that there exists a strong argument for the continued allocation of public funding for Youthreach. For STTCs funding should continue for the next 10-15 years.⁸⁹

4.3.2 Local Policy Context

▪ Adult Education Services Strategic Plan 2005-2009

In September 2004 Co Donegal VEC’s Adult Education Board carried out an organisational review of the Service and prepared a strategic plan to guide its work from 2005-2009. This initiative was promoted by:

- A significant expansion of the Adult Education Service since 1998
- Increased levels of funding at some levels of service
- The publication of the White Paper on Adult Education, 2000, ‘Learning for Life’

⁸⁵ Department of Education & Science. *Youthreach and Senior Traveller Training Centre Programmes funded by the Department of Education and Science. Value for Money Review*. Dublin: Department of Education & Science, May 2008

⁸⁶ Ibid., p.12

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p.13

⁸⁹ Ibid., p.13

- The establishment of Donegal County Development Board and the strategy developed, in particular by the Lifelong Learning Sectoral Working Group, which has implications for the provision of adult learning opportunities in the County⁹⁰

It examined the operational context of the county at that time in terms of the external and internal contexts and developed the values and vision for the Service. This review now examines the intervening period and will replace the 2005-2009 Strategic Plan.

- ***Co Donegal VEC Education Plan 2006-2010***

In 2006 Co Donegal VEC produced its first Education Plan for the five year period 2006-2010 as required by the VEC (Amendment) Act, 2001. This strategic plan:

...is the first step in shaping the future of the educational services which the Committee will, based on its record of service to-date, particularly to the socially excluded, deliver to individuals and communities throughout County Donegal, in order to cater for their educational and learning needs.⁹¹

Development of the plan required extensive consultations with key stakeholders both internal and external to the organisation. This consultation process highlighted the organisation's various strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats from which emerged key issues and challenges, categorised into five key themes:

1. Education Service Provision
2. Learning Environment
3. Organisational Development
4. Partnership
5. Image, Identity and Promotion

These five themes have shaped the strategic aims and objectives through which the Committee delivers its educational services through a range of actions. The plan also lays out Co Donegal VEC's vision of 'excellence in a quality, learner centred education service'⁹² and its mission 'to promote, offer and support accessible, inclusive and holistic learning opportunities which will enable young people and adults to empower themselves to reach their full potential in society.'⁹³

⁹⁰ County Donegal Vocational Education Committee. *Adult Education Service Strategic Plan 2005-2009*. Letterkenny: Co Donegal VEC, 2005, p.1

⁹¹ County Donegal Vocational Education Committee. *Education Plan 2006-2010*. Letterkenny: Co Donegal VEC, 2006(a), p.4

⁹² Ibid., p.12

⁹³ Ibid.

The implementation of the Education Plan is overseen by a Strategic Development Team from within the VEC, led by the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and the Education Officer (EO).

▪ ***Quality Assurance Systems***

Three Quality Assurance Systems (QAS) have been introduced to the Adult Education Service in the last number of years, namely the FETAC QAS which affects all programmes, the Youthreach and STTC Quality Framework Initiative (QFI) and Basic Education Programme Evolving Quality Framework (EQF). These have become integral elements of the day-to-day work in the programmes affected by them.

The FETAC QAS covers all programmes offering FETAC accredited modules.⁹⁴ The Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999 requires that all providers of further education and training programmes leading to FETAC awards establish procedures to quality assure their programmes and agree these procedures with FETAC. In 2004 FETAC published guidelines for providers which set out a common framework for quality assurance which all providers must apply in a manner appropriate to their own context. This common framework requires providers to develop and document a series of policies and procedures⁹⁵ capturing their existing best practice, complemented by an internal monitoring and evaluation system to recognise excellence and facilitate improvement. FETAC monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of each provider's quality assurance system and review the agreement within a maximum period of five years. Since January 2005, provider registration with FETAC is through agreement of quality assurance; providers wishing to register with FETAC for the first time must first agree their quality assurance procedures with FETAC. Co Donegal VEC's Adult Education Services was the first VEC in the country to be approved by FETAC for their Quality Assurance System in September 2005.

The Youthreach and STTC QFI was established in November 2000. Through extensive consultation with the various stakeholder groups a Quality Framework was developed.

⁹⁴ In the case of Co Donegal VEC's Adult Education Service this includes Basic Education, BTEI, VTOS, Youthreach, STTC, I.T. Training Centre, some Self-Financing Night Classes and Community Education Support Programme (BTEI).

⁹⁵ These include the policy areas of communications; equality; staff recruitment and development; access, transfer and progression; programme development, delivery and review; fair and consistent assessment of learners; protection for learners and self-evaluation of programmes and services.

The Quality Framework comprises four building blocks – the quality standards (27 quality areas), Centre Development Planning (CDP), Internal Centre Evaluation (ICE) and External Centre Evaluation (Inspectors). It aims to develop and implement a quality assurance model for Youthreach and the STTCs that will lead to continuous improvement in the service offered by centres and in a manner that meets the needs of students, staff and management. In practice this means that all centres have developed three year centre development plans, with the Lifford Youthreach centre having just completed it's second plan as it was one of the original national pilot centres; all centres have completed the ICE process at least once, producing an annual report and both the STTC and the Lifford Youthreach centre have been inspected by DES Inspectors.⁹⁶

The Basic Education Programme EQF is a quality assurance system for Adult Basic Education (ABE) which aims to improve the quality of the service to students and other ABE users. It was developed by the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) in collaboration with VECs and funded by the DES. In line with national and international best practice the EQF is based on self-evaluation and uses a stakeholder model of involvement. It can also be used for continuous improvement and planning and accountability. The EQF sets out the features of a good adult basic education service. There are eighteen statements of quality grouped in five quality areas.

▪ ***An Straitéis – Donegal County Strategy 2002-2012***

In 2002 the Donegal County Development Board (CDB), of which Co Donegal VEC is a member, published *An Straitéis – Donegal County Strategy 2002-2012*.⁹⁷ The CDB is tasked with promoting and co-ordinating economic, social and cultural matters in the County and therefore has 'a role in co-ordinating all aspects of development and of public service delivery in Donegal.'⁹⁸ It comprises representatives from a broad range of sectors including local government, state agencies, local development, social partners and the community and voluntary sector. *An Straitéis* represents a comprehensive and integrated ten year development strategy for the county covering economic, social and

⁹⁶ See for example Department of Education & Science. *Evaluation of Centre for Education Report. St Fiachra's Training Centre: Senior Traveller Training Centre, Letterkenny*. 22 May 2008, http://www.education.ie/insreports/report1_ST0005.htm , accessed 07 September 2008

⁹⁷ County Development Boards were set up in early 2000 in each of the twenty-nine County Councils and the five cities in the Republic to integrate and coordinate various elements of development and service delivery at local level.

⁹⁸ Donegal County Development Board. *An Straitéis – Donegal County Strategy 2002-2012*. Lifford: Donegal CDB, 2002, p.6

cultural matters. Its actions are carried out under three sectoral working groups (SWGs) – productive sector; human resources, culture and social inclusion and social and economic infrastructure. The second SWG is of particular relevance to Adult Education Services as it incorporates the areas of and actions relating to:

- Social Inclusion
 - Lifelong Learning
 - Culture
 - Grúpa Oibre na Gaeilge
 - Donegal County Community Forum
 - Community Development
 - Youth and Children
 - Women's Sector
 - Sport
-
- ***Interdepartmental Working Group on Donegal***

The Interdepartmental Working Group on Donegal was established by the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment in 2005 in light of 'ongoing employment difficulties'⁹⁹ in the county. Its purpose was to:

make recommendations to the Minister on an agreed list of projects and actions requiring priority implementation, so as to assist in increasing the attractiveness of Donegal as a location for enterprises, both in terms of job creation and job retention. In the main, the projects and actions concerned will be those where implementation and funding decisions are required at national rather than at local level.¹⁰⁰

It published its report in July 2006. While the report largely deals with infrastructural and entrepreneurial issues, of interest to the Adult Education Service is that it notes that in terms of high levels of educational disadvantage amongst the unemployed:

The implications are serious from an economic investment perspective. If the future of the Donegal economy is in the post-manufacture, technology based sectors, there must be an available pool of potential employees who possess the skills necessary for such employment. However the findings of both SFSS and the Task Force show a major educational and skills deficit among the unemployed who would be these potential employees. This deficit is particularly seen among male unemployed.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Department of Enterprise, Trade & Employment. Op. cit., 2006, p.3

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p.10. SFSS is the Social and Family Support Service.

5. REVIEW FINDINGS

This section presents the findings from the ten focus groups under each of the five strategic themes of Co Donegal VEC's Education Plan. Each section is loosely presented in terms of the strengths that were identified, the challenges faced and recommendations made to meet these challenges. Some of the findings tend to overlap a number of themes. While individual focus group participants are not identified (and therefore not referenced) for confidentiality reasons, some direct quotations are provided to illustrate a particular point, simply because they were well articulated.

5.1 Education Service Provision

Strengths

In terms of education service provision the feedback received from all focus groups was generally positive. The Service was observed as being very responsive in meeting the needs of local communities, in being student-centred and having staff that '*go the extra mile*' for their students.

Students were generally very happy with the programmes they were undertaking, commenting that they have opened up new opportunities, helped their confidence and given them better communication skills. They also enjoyed being able to meet new people and learn about other cultures. A past student noted that '*I have fond memories of here - [the] support was out of this world and I would recommend it to anyone needing a different path.*' Moreover, staff observed that people could build their self-esteem and confidence through the programmes – they were not just for progression.

In terms of the staff that teach them and facilitate their learning, students found they were pleasant, approachable, friendly and helpful, noting that '*it there's a problem in class you have a smile rather than a frown.*' Others pointed to the standard of teaching arguing it is '*very, very high*' and pitched at the appropriate level. Importantly, they recognised that they were treated like adults and felt that everyone was treated equally in terms of access and in their classes. This equal treatment also extended to fellow students; as one older student noted: '*I got great help from younger people on my course – they mothered me rather than me mothering them.*' Younger adult students also liked the way they were treated like adults.

The difference the programmes and services have made to their lives is palpable. One student noted how *'I worked for twenty-nine years, was made redundant...some say this was the end of the world...education opened a new door.'* Another commented that *'classes have helped me a lot...I can help [the] children with their homework and communicate better'*: this was a comment agreed with by many of the students. Another noted that *'...as a married person, to be able to come back to school...never thought I could do that so thanks to the VEC.'* Students noted how the times of the courses suited them, particularly those with children, and that the courses were flexible in meeting their needs in terms of taking their problems into account and giving them enough time to do their coursework; however, it should be noted that this was not felt to be the case for those undertaking the Leaving Certificate. Moreover, some students commented on how the courses were exciting and relevant to everyday life and they liked the relaxed atmosphere they were delivered in. For many the fact that the courses were free was very important.

Induction and guidance provision was a particularly important support for adult students: one student commented that *'I started in the [LY]IT this year and I'm only there because of [name of guidance counsellor].'* Other agencies, such as the DSFA for example, were full of praise for the Adult Learner Guidance Service: *'I have referred more and more people to that service for their advice for disadvantaged people that we couldn't advise. In an ideal world we should have that type of service working for other groups – the young unemployed. The results are phenomenal. DALGS is an excellent service, we would need more.'* Other staff also remarked on its usefulness as they simply do not have such expertise.

Challenges

However, as alluded to in section 4 of this review (operational context), the Service faces considerable challenges in the future and so the current economic downturn framed much of the thinking and viewpoints regarding the Service. While it is viewed as a responsive service, it was felt that this responsiveness and indeed the quality of its provision will be tested in the coming years due to an increased demand for its programmes and support services and possibly reduced budgets. Thus, the economic downturn means that the Adult Education Service will take on a greater importance. Furthermore it was also felt that its student-centred approach will be challenged in the

future in terms of the need to balance this approach with attaining accreditation; this pressure, it is believed, will come not only from the DES but also from students themselves, some of whom staff believe are increasingly more accreditation-driven. A number of other concerns were also highlighted by the focus groups.¹⁰²

- Concern was expressed in two focus groups about other agencies delivering the same programmes and services as the Adult Education Service which is (legally) obliged to deliver such programmes and services whereas others are not. This concern centred on the availability of scarce resources which, it was felt, were being spent on the duplication of services. Moreover, it was also felt that this called into question the quality of some delivery when the quality assurance systems applying to the Adult Education Service were considered. However, the opposing view noted that adult education was a bigger issue than just providing courses: for many adults, their first experience of education was a negative one and getting them back into education is a very complex issue which requires huge amounts of work from a range of organisations. Moreover, it was noted that programme provision by others had sprung up simply because no one else was providing services in some areas, while others argued that *'education is not just for employment...need to be able to help your children. [It's] not necessarily about being employment driven.'* Underlining these concerns was the issue of co-ordination and it was recognised that this is beyond the remit of the Adult Education Service, needing instead to come from a higher authority. An interdepartmental group from the DES, the HSE, the DETE, the DSFA and including the voluntary and community sectors would be required to deal with this issue effectively. Nevertheless, there is scope for the Service, and indeed the VEC itself, to lobby for such co-ordination, particularly in light of forthcoming budget restrictions.
- Related to the above concern, funding for the Service was described by some as *'piecemeal.'* More specifically, the under-resourcing of the Adult Learner Guidance Service was highlighted, particularly by external stakeholders such as the Inishowen Development Partnership (IDP) and the DFSA. For example, the DSFA views this as a very important service for them in dealing with their own

¹⁰² These concerns are not listed in any order of importance.

clients when *'trying to get people unemployed/underemployed better equipped to better themselves.'* The DFSA has, in the past, been *'plugging the hole'* in terms of funding elements of the guidance service and argued that this *'needs to be looked at seriously by the DES.'* Moreover, staff highlighted that the guidance service is only available for day classes, noting that night classes would also benefit from it. The overriding concern, however, is current and future budget cutbacks: *'in times of recession, cutting back on adult education is not only counter-productive, it's plain stupid.'*

- The cap on numbers for certain programmes, particularly VTOS, was viewed as *'ridiculous in this day and age.'* Moreover, it was felt by some that more VTOS programmes were required for the county. The example of Dungloe was given – *'the nearest VTOS is in Gortahork - people won't travel from Dungloe.'* Indeed, the greater difficulty is the lack of transport in the county. This presents a huge barrier for many people wanting to access programmes and services. Until the issue of rural transport is addressed, education provision needs to be brought out to communities.
- Related to the above concern is the further access barrier created by the age limitations on some programmes: eligibility for VTOS, for example, is for those aged 21 years and over which presents provision difficulties for the 18-21 years age group.
- The low participation levels of men was an issue highlighted by all focus groups, whether students, staff or external stakeholders. Students believe this happens for a range of reasons:
 - *some men wouldn't think about going back – it's a pride thing*
 - *money is not great – men want to go out and earn a wage*
 - *if you're a man [you] might be the breadwinner and it's hard to say you'll spend two years doing a course*
 - *Courses – childcare, community care – are more geared towards women*
 - *During the Celtic Tiger more men had jobs – that will change. They will do that [a course] because they've no choice – if they had a choice they wouldn't go*

However, one male student did note *'it's ok for men to be here. When I was younger I had no interest in learning – it equalled rules. Now [I'm] shocked: I sit beside the tutor!*' Moreover, it was noted that a lot of women have been made redundant in the county in recent years, which could explain the high levels of female participants. Nevertheless, the observation was made that it is difficult for all education providers to get men to attend courses and this is not just an issue experienced by the VEC.

- While student concerns largely focused on accommodation issues (discussed in section 5.2 Learning Environment), there were also some concerns relating to educational service provision. Students expressed concern about the drop-out levels in some programmes, observing that this happened for a variety of reasons including childcare issues, family circumstances and course pressures, highlighting the need for continuing supports for adult students. However, staff noted that students sometimes leave because of higher training allowances offered on other courses: some students have returned to VEC courses subsequently because the support offered is more suited to their needs. As noted already Leaving Certificate students found the course quite difficult in terms of its inflexibility, but again staff observed that this is the nature of this particular course as it is almost entirely exam based unlike FETAC's continuous assessment approach. Moreover, students undertaking FETAC accreditation found the disparity between some levels difficult to cope with. Some students therefore expressed the desire for more one-to-one tuition. For many students, regardless of accreditation type, the pressure of having to complete homework and assignments within tight timeframes was a struggle, particularly for those who are parents. One student noted for example, that the group would have preferred a three hour maths class within which they could have completed their homework, rather than a more pressurised two-hour class. Additionally, students starting from a low educational base felt that the programme timeframe (e.g. two years) does not lend itself to those students who, for example, had to learn how to read and write first. Furthermore, those undertaking FETAC accreditation find the wait for results too long. However, it should be noted that under the FETAC assessment system, those students assessed in November have their certificate issued in January, while those assessed in May have their certificates issued in

September. Additionally, students would like more feedback from tutors in this regard.

- From an external perspective, it was argued that not all staff work from an adult education ethos: students do not want to feel that they are back in school – adult education should be based on the Freire model¹⁰³ (a reflective model) and it was therefore suggested that some training should be provided.
- From a staff perspective, the huge amount of paperwork that has been introduced because of the FETAC QAS has presented them with a greatly increased workload. Moreover, this has come without any extra resources from the DES to develop and implement the QAS or to deliver it in terms of tutors' paperwork.
- Additionally, volunteer literacy tutors were unhappy with having to implement the Mapping the Learning Journey tool, believing that it was not at all helpful as it is quite complex and puts them and their students under pressure; it was viewed as a blunt instrument for measuring student progress.
- Finally, in terms of equality, while the Service operates an open-door admissions policy within the confines of specific programme restrictions as laid out by the DES¹⁰⁴, this does not mean that there is equality of outcome for all. It was noted that the training, childcare, travel and meal allowances are not adequate or, in the case of some students, are not available at all. In a county the size of County Donegal this presents huge and continuous barriers for many current and potential adult students, a view expressed by many focus group participants. The Service does strive to provide its programmes and services from an equality perspective. For example, programmes and services provide disabled access venues when the AETCs cannot provide this. Nevertheless, from an equality perspective, the concern was expressed that in the current climate of budget

¹⁰³ Paulo Freire (1921-1997) was a Brazilian educator and an influential educational theorist.

¹⁰⁴ For example, Youthreach is only open to those aged 16-20 years while VTOS is only open to those aged over 21 and in receipt of certain benefits.

restrictions the danger exists that the emphasis on social inclusion will lessen.¹⁰⁵

It was therefore noted that an equality approach needs to be kept to the forefront.

Recommendations

Looking to the future, the biggest issue for the Service is the provision of programmes and services for the unemployed in the county, particularly as the numbers signing on the live register continues to rise. A greater focus will be needed on that section of the population which does not currently possess upper second level educational qualifications. In particular, the Service needs to explore how it can meet the educational needs of those who do not readily avail of mainstream adult provision e.g. men (particularly those who are living in isolated and rural areas), Travellers and people with disabilities. In this regard, the Service needs to review the range of courses it currently offers to meet these needs.

There is also a need for the Service to continue to lobby for a more co-ordinated approach to service provision from the DES, as well as for the maintenance of current budget levels to enable it to meet the level of need in the county. Additionally the Service needs to continue to lobby for improved supports for students (training, travel, meal and childcare allowances) as these are crucial to allowing access to education for the most educationally disadvantaged. The Service needs to be supported in this action by the VEC itself and its senior management.

The continued improvement of the educational service provision would also benefit from ensuring that high quality induction and guidance are provided for students. However, it is recognised that currently this can only be done within given resources and specific target groups (as specified by the DES). This may also reduce drop-out rates on some programmes, an issue which requires regular monitoring. Additionally the Service needs to ensure that the initiatives which enable the provision of programmes and services from an equality perspective should be further developed so as to enable those individuals and groups within the nine equality grounds to participate.

¹⁰⁵ This fear is not without foundation. The 2008 Budget, set out on 14 October 2008, cut the budget of the Equality Authority by 47%. See Coulter, C. 'Budget Cuts Will Severely Limit Effectiveness of State Watchdogs' in *The Irish Times*, 11 November 2008 and O'Brien, C. and Coulter, C. 'Cuts Will Impair Core Functions – Equality Body' in *The Irish Times*, 12 November 2008

In terms of concerns relating to results from FETAC, it should be noted that in future the Service will be responsible for its own assessment (under the FETAC QAS) which will enable it to provide a quicker response to students in terms of feedback and accreditation. Moreover, staff need to ensure that students are very clear about the assessment process at the beginning of their courses through their induction programmes and their student handbooks, with this information revisited with students on a regular basis.

In terms of staff training, it should be noted that the Service has already provided specific training for a number of staff on tutoring from an adult education perspective.¹⁰⁶ It is therefore recommended that the provision of training such as this is continued and afforded to all staff. Additionally, the Basic Education Service should explore the provision of simplified assessment methods for volunteer literacy tutors to enable them to better record student progress.

¹⁰⁶ Certificate in Practical Teaching Skills for Adult Education Tutors certified by the Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT).

5.2 Learning Environment

Strengths

As noted earlier, the Adult Education Service operates across a very wide range of settings in the county. The Service is fortunate to have a good infrastructural base in terms of six AETCs and a number of other buildings such as the Glengad Youthreach centre and the Adult Guidance/Community Education office in Donegal Town, all of which it owns. These premises provide a hub for programmes and services and enable outreach work to extend from them. Moreover, the quality of the AETCs was noted by senior staff and management and external stakeholders as being very good.

A further strength of the Adult Education Service is the supports it provides to adult students, which include training, travel, meal and childcare allowances. This is particularly true of the child care support which is seen as an integral part of the programmes and services offered: four out of the six AETCs provide on-site crèche facilities. This is also important from an equality perspective.

Overall, staff felt that they were reasonably well-resourced to provide the programmes and support services within their remit. However, concern was expressed by volunteer literacy tutors over non-awareness of some resources.

Challenges

Nevertheless, room for improvement was also noted. In terms of day-to-day utilisation of facilities, staff and students expressed disquiet about the size of their rooms relative to the number of students using them. Additionally concern was expressed with the canteen facilities in some centres in terms of menus, opening hours and the timetabling of use. In terms of opening hours, some students would like to see earlier opening hours – if they have to travel a distance in the morning they would like to be able to get a cup of tea before class. For others, if their timetabled break is not taken, this can cause access problems due to the volume of students utilising the facilities. Students in another centre for education expressed disquiet over the lack of heating in the building in the mornings. Additionally, staff expressed concern about the lack of staff rooms in some centres and of bathroom facilities in others. Staff and students attending the Letterkenny AETC were particularly concerned with the lack of parking facilities. Moreover, it was noted that disability parking is often used by non-disabled drivers.

For many students, computer access for completing assignments (particularly for childcare students) was also a concern, particularly for those who do not have computers at home.

Students and staff alike noted that some centres are not accessible for disabled students. However, it was recognised by staff and senior management that this is a challenge for the whole organisation, not just the Adult Education Service.

Recommendations

In light of the feedback from the focus groups, the Service needs to address a number of issues over the next three years.

Room utilisation issues are difficult to address, particularly when, in most centres, premises are currently utilised to their maximum potential. However, new accommodation options need to be explored on an on-going basis. Similarly the issue of parking at the Letterkenny AETC is also difficult to address as this is an issue not only for AETC students but also for AETC and VEC (administrative office) staff. However, it does need to be explored by the AEOs through the AETC staff and the Strategy Development Team and the outcome of this exploration communicated to students.

Both of these recommendations also highlight two other necessary actions: the need for the DES to provide a capital budget for the further and adult education sector and the need for students to have a structured mechanism to discuss such issues with staff and management. It is therefore recommended that the requirement for a capital budget for adult and further education is continually highlighted with the DES and that programmes and services give consideration to setting up clear communication structures for students to communicate with staff about such issues.

The provision of computer access for students outside of their taught timetables to enable them to complete assignments also needs to be examined. Students suggested the transfer of rooms between courses so that perhaps one day a week computer students move out of the computer room to allow childcare students have access to

computers. Childcare students also suggested that taught classes should take place four days a week and the fifth day given over to assignment work (when they would then have computer access). The Service may also want to consider computer provision in other buildings for completion of assignments.

Finally, disability access for all AETCs and other outreach buildings owned by the Service also needs to be addressed, where possible and where this has not already happened: disabled access has recently been addressed in the Ballyshannon AETC, for example.

5.3 Organisational Development

Strengths

In terms of organisational development the expansion and improvement of the Service over the last ten years has been quite significant. The Service is viewed as being *'embedded in the culture of the organisation [Co Donegal VEC]...it's viewed as an integral part of it.'* Moreover, it is viewed as being an integrated Service both in its own right and within the VEC as a whole. The operational structures that were established in 1999 (when the two current AEOs were appointed) have served the Service well. Furthermore, the development of the Senior Staff Team¹⁰⁷ in 2004 to assist with information sharing has been crucial in providing a more strategically integrated approach to provision across the whole Service. Within the VEC as a whole the AEOs are members of the VEC's Strategy Development Team which implements the VEC's Education Plan. This further strengthens the integration of the Adult Education Service. The added value of this involvement has been that it has provided the Adult Education Service with a greater understanding of the other services of the VEC, for example, the second-level system. It is recognised by Senior staff that the Adult Education Service has been given considerable support by the CEO and the VEC's wider support services. It was noted that the Service has a *'great pioneering spirit in terms of trying new things and being at the forefront of anything innovative'*, the EqIA running in tandem with this review being a case in point.

It is also recognised that one of the Service's particular strengths is its staff: they come from very diverse backgrounds including industry, the informal education sector and the community sector and bring a wealth of experience to the Service. The staff enable the Service to provide a student-centred approach to its education service provision: *'we put the student first in anything that we try to do...the ethos of the staff is focused on the person walking in the door.'* Moreover, the vast majority of staff having a clear understanding that *'students are there to grow as people and can bring their [life] experience...they're not just there to learn.'* Consequently, it was felt that there is a *'commitment within staff to try and go the extra mile to facilitate students.'* Many of the staff, prior to becoming full-time, worked on a part-time basis within the Service. This

¹⁰⁷ The Senior Staff Team is made up of the County Coordinators or a senior representative of each of the programmes and services within Adult Education Services, along with the two AEOs.

has meant that they have a very good understanding of the Service and its ethos. Staff themselves noted how staff networking has improved immensely in recent years.

Challenges

Despite such developments in recent years, it was felt by some focus group participants that more opportunities could be created to work more closely with the VEC's own second-level schools, in the provision of courses for example. This is an opportunity that schools would welcome. However, this presents its own difficulties as the vast majority of current Adult Education programmes and services take place in the day time when schools are also full. Moreover, the Service is cognisant of the fact that for the many of the adults attending its programmes, schools hold unpleasant memories for them in terms of their initial experiences of the education system. Nevertheless, this is an area that should be explored in the coming years.

While staff networking has improved considerably, there is still a need to develop this further. Some staff remarked how they do not have enough opportunities to network and how they often did not know what was going on in other programmes. Additionally, staff support initiatives appear to be minimal for some programmes which is perhaps magnified by the lack of networking opportunities. A further related challenge for the Service is ensuring staff are aware of the management structures within centres. This is particularly important for staff when centre Directors/Coordinators are absent.

The diversity of the staff also presents a challenge in terms of staff selection and recruitment processes as there is a wide range of posts which do not easily fit with traditional understandings of posts such as teachers and principals. Nevertheless, it was noted that the administrative staff in head office were supportive of the work of the Adult Education Service.

The level of literacy awareness amongst staff was also a concern, particularly in relation to sensitivities around literacy students. Additionally, volunteer literacy tutors expressed concerns around the informal counselling role they also provide for many of their students and feel out of their depth in this respect because of a lack of training.

From an equality perspective, the provision of services for people with disabilities was viewed as a challenge for all sections of the VEC, not just Adult Education Services. To a lesser extent it was also felt that a further challenge for the service is dealing with sexual orientation in terms of tackling homophobia (including homophobic bullying) amongst students and staff and simply allowing such students '*the right to be who they are.*'

Recommendations

In terms of organisational development a number of recommendations can be made for action over the next three years.

Firstly, the need for information sharing is enormous. This needs to be addressed at two levels: staff networking and internal communications (there is also a need for information sharing at an external level but this is dealt with in section 5.5 Image, Identity and Promotion). In terms of staff networking, the Service needs to facilitate regularly planned and semi-structured networking opportunities which can be timetabled so as to avoid disruptions to students. This may also need to extend outside the county, for example to enable Leaving Certificate teachers to network with other adult education Leaving Certificate teachers. For volunteer literacy tutors, however, less structured opportunities may be useful; while they meet annually for a meal, it was agreed that this was not the time to discuss resources, teaching methods etc. Moreover, some staff expressed the need for whole centre staff meetings, not just programme specific meetings. This should also assist with increasing staff support levels, while additional activities in this regard should also be examined. In terms of internal communications, consideration should be given to the development of a bi-annual internal staff newsletter. While some programmes already produce their own newsletters (e.g. Youthreach/STTC, Basic Education), all staff need to have greater awareness of what is going on within the wider service, not just within their own programmes. Furthermore, staff within the wider organisation need to be made more aware of developments within the Adult Education Service. Internal communications would also be assisted by examining how programmes and services can integrate themselves further in the future. Additionally, consideration should be given to enabling volunteer literacy tutors to communicate more with each other to remove the sense of isolation that they appear to struggle with – in this respect, Adult Literacy Organisers (ALOs) should consider further

support mechanisms that could assist with this while also considering maintaining contact with those volunteers who are still registered but not currently active with students.

In dealing with concerns around staff literacy awareness, it is recommended that all staff complete literacy awareness training. Additionally, consideration should be given to the provision of basic counselling skills/listening ear training for volunteer literacy tutors.

From an equality perspective, it was recognised that equality awareness training is required by the Service's staff. Moreover, in light of the fact that until now, the equality agenda within Co Donegal VEC has largely focused on employment, it was proposed that all VEC staff could avail of equality awareness training and that Adult Education Service staff could assist the whole organisation with this by the sharing of best practice. Additionally, the Service should explore how it can create further links with the schools.

5.4 Partnership

Strengths

Partnership is a critical component of Co Donegal VEC's Adult Education Service. Educational disadvantage cannot be tackled by any one organisation and a partnership approach to this is necessary, especially in a county the size of Donegal. In striving to meet the learning needs of local communities the Adult Education Service works formally and informally with a wide range of individuals and organisations (community, voluntary, statutory and business) not only across the county, but also at a regional, national and indeed, international level.¹⁰⁸ The Service is considered to be largely effective at working with other agencies. The relationship the Service has with local communities and community groups is viewed as a particular strength. It is therefore encouraging to note how in the community sector, for example, funding provided by the Adult Education Service to community education providers has oftentimes enabled them to access funding from other sources as they were viewed as capable of handling funding if Co Donegal VEC's Adult Education Service had already trusted them to do so. The impact of this 'first money on the table' role should not be underestimated in terms of its contribution to building the capacity of local communities throughout the county to meet their own development needs.

Moreover, senior staff pointed out that the Service '*rarely says no to anything*' in terms of working in partnership – it is a Service that is open to getting involved with others despite the fact that sometimes this works and at other times it does not. While this could also be construed as a weakness in terms of overstressing the Service (and indeed some staff remarked how they would like the Service to refrain from piloting any more new initiatives until current provision is consolidated), the Senior Staff team viewed this as a uniquely positive element of the Service.

Challenges

The main challenge identified in terms of partnership is the effect the current economic downturn will have on this work. It was felt that it will test the relationships built up by the Service, particularly, as already noted, in terms of its responsiveness to local communities.

¹⁰⁸ See County Donegal Vocational Education Committee. Op. cit., 2008, pp.33-34

The concern was also expressed by some focus group participants that county structures do not always filter down to local level. Therefore inter-agency work at a local level is very important as *'it really does make a much better impact...it's not always about resources – just knowing the face or the person.'*

Community education providers, who are dispersed across the whole county and its islands, felt some structured network meetings each year would benefit them greatly in terms of sharing knowledge regarding courses, tutors and administration, removing the sense of isolation felt by some of them and generally enabling them to provide a better quality service. While the Community Education Facilitator hosts an annual seminar which is welcomed, it was felt that this did not allow for more in-depth discussions on day-to-day education service provision.

Voluntary literacy tutors suggested that links could be made with primary schools in terms of identifying parents in need of literacy support.

Recommendations

In light of these challenges, it was therefore noted that more co-ordination of this partnership role is needed in order to avoid duplication of programmes and services and the subsequent wasting of resources while also tackling the severe effects of the economic downturn on the county through the myriad of agencies, not just the Adult Education Service. It was suggested that this could take the form of an inter-agency forum where organisational strategies and particular initiatives that are taking place could be examined *'so everyone knows what's going on.'* While this arrangement already exists at a county level in terms of the CDB, the efficacy of this structure for meeting organisational needs on a more frequent and localised basis was questioned. This issue could be explored.

Additionally, the Service should look at the possibility of drawing up guidelines for staff within the Service on how to work in partnership to ensure maximum clarity around this area of their work.

In terms of the Literacy service working in partnership with schools, it should explore the continued or increased provision of family learning programmes in partnership with

Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) co-ordinators, rural co-ordinators and principals.

To address the needs of Community Education providers, it is recommended that the Community Education Facilitator facilitates a number of structured network meetings for providers on an annual basis (in addition to the annual seminar), to enable them to share information, thus increasing the quality of their service provision.

5.5 Image, Identity and Promotion

Strengths

In terms of its image and identity, the Adult Education Service was perceived by some focus group participants as being well known throughout the county, to the extent that it is '*probably the best known element of the VEC.*' This is due to the fact that the Service appears to be well promoted within the local press and the VEC's Administrative Office regularly receives a high level of enquiries about its programmes and support services.

Challenges

However, while this perception is understandable, this view was held by the minority. Staff working directly within the Service and indeed students were of the view that it does not promote itself enough. Certainly events such as the annual Adult Learner Fair held each January were cited as a great way of showcasing the Service. However, all Adult Education staff and student focus groups felt that more needed to be done in terms of the overall branding and promotion of the Service.

Moreover, the Senior Staff Team is concerned with how the Service is defined within the public consciousness in an already complex education and training market. This concern centres on the complexity of the Service confusing not only (potential) students but also staff within the Service and indeed, the wider organisation and wider community. Simply put, it was felt by some Senior Staff that there is a fundamental lack of understanding about what the Adult Education Service does. While the Senior Staff Team has a clear understanding of what the Service stands for in terms of being a caring service that is student-centred and approaches its education service provision from an adult education ethos, communicating this understanding presents a major challenge, particularly when this needs to be communicated to a range of audiences such as (potential) students, other Adult Education staff, community groups, second-level schools, other VEC colleagues/sections, employers etc. This concern was embodied by the comment of one adult student who noted that '*the VEC words might not mean a lot to people – make Adult Education more prominent.*'

Senior management felt that this issue is not helped in part by the way the Service is funded by the DES: programmes such as VTOS and BTEI largely mean nothing to the general public when all they need for example, is a childcare course to enable them to

get a job in this area. Additionally, the hugely important outreach element of the Service, it was felt, does not help this confusion. While the Service had made progress in recent years, for example in producing a booklet outlining all programmes and services, more work needs to be done to promote the Service as some focus group participants were aware of this particular example while others were not. It was therefore recognised by the Senior Staff Team that there is a clear need to present a more cohesive Service rather than what appears to be a disjointed and unwieldy set of programmes.

Students were also of the opinion that the Service should do more to promote itself, particularly in the current climate whereby *'there are long dole queues and I think people don't know about this...it's not advertised properly'*. Almost all the students who participated in the four student focus groups had primarily heard about the various programmes and services they availed of through word of mouth or to a lesser extent had come across their course accidentally on the internet or in the local library. Younger adult students had heard about their particular programme through word of mouth because a sister, brother, cousin or friend was already participating. Most agreed that they had not heard about it from the school they had left. For older adult students the view was also expressed that the Service should do more to promote itself: one student commented that they had often driven past the Letterkenny AETC (based within the VEC Administrative Office on Ard O Donnell, Letterkenny) and *'never knew what went on here'*. In other words, they had no idea what the building was or that adult education courses took place or were available within it.

An additional concern for staff centres on the public's perception of FETAC accreditation. Staff believe FETAC holds little currency as yet either in the county or in Northern Ireland in terms of education and employment progression routes (a view confirmed by a focus group participant working in this area). More work needs to be done to promote an understanding of FETAC accreditation in terms of content, equivalencies and its place within the NFQ. Some efforts have already been made in this area by the Youthreach programme for example, which has designed a leaflet specifically for employers outlining FETAC equivalencies *vis-à-vis* other accreditation such as the Junior Certificate, Leaving Certificate, Leaving Certificate Applied etc.

Recommendations

There is clearly a need for the Service to not only better promote its programmes and services but also the accreditation it offers and the buildings within which they take place. While the Service has begun to address the latter issue in 2007, with clearly visible signs being erected outside the AETCs in Donegal Town, Milford and Gort a 'Choirce, this signage also needs to be provided for the AETCs in Ballyshannon, Buncrana and Letterkenny and outreach centres in Glengad, Lifford and Ard Scoil na gCeithre Maistir (Donegal Town).

In terms of promotion strategies, students suggested a range of methods that could be used including using advertising on the local radio (Highland) and making use of primary listenership periods such as the 5.30pm news slot. Students and staff alike suggested better use of the VEC's website in terms of regularly updating it. This suggestion could be taken a step further and use made of free networking sites such as Facebook, Bebo, MySpace and YouTube to create an AES presence. Students also suggested promotion of programmes and services through the Adult Learner Guidance Service and the DSFA: those receiving social welfare payments should be targeted directly in terms of programme/service promotion, instead of advertisements in the paper: *'we know these people are there, [its] getting them through the door'*.

Students, staff and volunteer literacy tutors also suggested using the personal stories of adult students which would be a powerful way of communicating how good the programmes are and what adults can get out of them; as one adult student noted *'I didn't realise how good it would be until I started. (Programme name) is great – you cover so much.'* While this method is already used by the guidance service during the Adult Learner Fair, this is just once a year and is a method that needs to be exploited more, particularly by other programmes and services. Additionally, staff suggested that each programme and service should host an annual open day or showcase/celebration event. Indeed, further consideration could be given to this idea for each centre, whether an AETC or other outreach centre. Further clarification would be much enhanced by the provision of a Service prospectus.

A number of other suggestions, which are cost free and can have immediate effect include the promotion of Co Donegal VEC's website (but particularly the Adult

Education Services section) on all brochures, booklets, letters and on all AES computers by having the website/AES section as the homepage. Additionally, all staff using corporate email addresses should have correct email signatures which include Co Donegal VEC Adult Education Services in the signature.

Consideration should also be given to creating a bi-annual public newsletter which is circulated widely to inform the public (and indeed, students and staff) about available programmes and services, activities happening within them and personal stories from current and past students.

Finally, a more concerted effort is required by all AES staff in their promotion efforts regarding FETAC: by staff responsible for liaising with employers and external stakeholders such as other education establishments, by senior VEC management, and nationally by FETAC themselves in terms of highlighting the equal viability of FETAC *vis-à-vis* other educational accreditation, including its place within the NQF and the differences between full and modular certification. An Adult Education Service prospectus would be of great benefit in this regard. Additionally the Service needs to explore whether local working groups should be set up with local employers, chambers of commerce etc as a vehicle for promoting FETAC. This would also meet some of the issues identified under the Education Service Provision theme in terms of increasing links with employers. Alternatively, ongoing presentations need to be made to employers in particular to promote FETAC and its place within the NFQ. However, this particular issue needs to be addressed on both sides of the border.

5.6 Monitoring Arrangements

The successful implementation of this plan requires continuous and regular monitoring, particularly to ensure that the plan is implemented from an equality perspective. To this end, the monitoring of the plan will primarily be the responsibility of the two AEOs, supported by the Senior Staff Team. The Senior Staff Team and the AEOs meet on a regular basis, approximately seven times per year. The plan will be monitored at these meetings, as a regular agenda item and more specifically once a year at a monitoring meeting set aside specifically to examine the plan in June of each year.

Additionally programmes/services will also monitor service provision for those within the nine grounds through the annual FETAC self-evaluation process, where applicable.

6. ACTION PLAN 2009-2011

6.1 EDUCATION SERVICE PROVISION

	Actions Identified	Output	Timescale	Responsibility	Evidence
1.	Provision of induction for all students before they begin programmes	Students are fully informed of all relevant information at beginning of course including being clear about course work expectations Students are clear about assessment processes and procedures (through induction and student handbooks) and this information is revisited on a regular basis	Ongoing	Programme/service coordinators and relevant staff	All students have completed induction programme to include assessment processes Reduced drop-out levels
2.	Regular review of drop-out figures	Watching brief maintained on (potential) drop-outs	Annual	AEOs / Senior Staff Team	Drop-out figures recorded and regularly reviewed
3.	Afford guidance opportunities for students as part of learning process within given resources and specified target groups	Students review progression opportunities	Ongoing	Programme/service coordinators / guidance/advocacy staff	Students receive ongoing guidance

	Actions Identified	Output	Timescale	Responsibility	Evidence
4.	Further development of initiatives to support education service provision from an equality perspective	<p>Enablement of participation by groups under the nine grounds</p> <p>Proactive recruitment of students from the nine grounds</p> <p>Assessment of need to provide applications forms, reports etc. in different formats e.g. large lettering, assistive technology, etc. and subsequent provision of same</p>	Ongoing	AEOs / Senior Staff Team	Increased participation by groups under the nine equality grounds
5.	Ongoing monitoring of education service provision amongst nine grounds through FETAC self-evaluations	Monitoring of service provision for those within the nine grounds is carried out routinely by all programmes/services	Ongoing	All (FETAC) programme/service managers	Equal provision of programmes/service for those within the nine grounds
6.	AES to explore ways to attract more male participants onto programme and services	Variety of tailored courses offered to meet the needs of (potential) male students	Ongoing	AEOs / Senior Staff Team / Adult Education Board / programme/service coordinators / SDT	More males undertaking programmes and services
7.	AES to review the range of courses offered e.g. retail, marketing etc.	Variety of courses offered to meet the needs of local communities	Ongoing	AEOs / Senior Staff Team / Adult Education Board	Greater range of courses offered in relation to identified need

	Actions Identified	Output	Timescale	Responsibility	Evidence
8.	Staff trained to teach/facilitate from an adult education ethos Staff to undertake general facilitation skills training	Staff from all programmes to undertake certified training in teaching skills for tutors	Ongoing: 2009 2010 2011	AEOs / programme/service coordinators	All staff complete certified training in teaching skills for adult education tutors
9.	Provision of simplified assessment methods for volunteer literacy tutors	Volunteer literacy tutors are better able to assess student progress	Ongoing	Basic Education Coordinator / ALOs / volunteer literacy tutors	Simplified assessment methods provided
10.	Highlight the need to maintain budgets/minimise budget cuts on adult education	Continued ability to meet the education and training needs of adults in Co Donegal	Ongoing	VEC / CEO / EO / AEOs / programme/service national associations	Budgets / programme/service levels are maintained
11.	Highlight the need for more supports (childcare, travel, meal) to enable adults to access programmes and services	Educationally disadvantaged adults throughout Co Donegal are enabled to return to education	Ongoing	VEC / CEO / EO / AEOs / programme/service national associations	Training supports (childcare, travel, meal) for adults are maintained/increased
12.	Highlight need to further co-ordinate programmes / services nationally within further and adult education with the DES	Clear provision of education and training programmes for adults	Ongoing	VEC / Adult Education Board / SDT	Provision of co-ordinated education course for adults

6.2 LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

	Actions Identified	Output	Timescale	Responsibility	Evidence
1.	Review of physical facilities in AETCs/centres for education e.g. examination of room provision/utilisation, car-parking facilities, bathroom facilities	Discussion with students re physical facilities	Ongoing	AEOs / SDT	Students happy with room provision of physical facilities
2.	Seek necessary resources for provision of a capital budget for further and adult education	Capital budgets will enable the provision of better learning environments for students and staff	Ongoing	VEC / CEO / EO / AEOs / programme/service national associations	Provision of a capital budget for adult education
3.	Consideration given to setting up appropriate communications structures for students	Students will have a structured mechanism for discussing arising issues with staff and management	1 year: 2009	AEOs / programme/service coordinators	Appropriate communication structures established
4.	Provision of computer facilities out of class time for students	Computer facilities provided for students to complete assignments	1 year: 2009	AEOs / programme/service coordinators	Computer facilities made available to students
5.	Better disabled access in AETCs/centres for education	Improved disabled access to all centres	Ongoing 2009 2010 2011	AEOs / SDT	Disabled access available in centres where possible

6.3 ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

	Actions Identified	Output	Timescale	Responsibility	Evidence
1.	Facilitate networking events for programme/service staff	Greater information sharing, improved communications, increased confidence, sense of isolation removed – all leading to better coordination and quality of programmes/services	Ongoing	Programme/service Co-ordinators	At least one semi-structured networking event organised per year per programme/service, particularly for volunteer literacy tutors, community education providers, full-time/part-time staff and/or one event organised for the AES on a county basis
2.	Improved communications amongst staff within and between programmes/services	Internal staff newsletter Whole centre staff meetings Regular contact with volunteer literacy tutors and ALOs	Bi-annual: February October Ongoing / Regularly Ongoing	Senior Staff Team Programme/service coordinators / AEOs Basic Education Coordinator	Newsletter produced and circulated amongst all staff twice a year Monthly whole centre staff meetings Record of contact and support given to volunteer literacy tutors
3.	Further clarification of management structures within AETCs	Staff have a clearer understanding or roles and responsibilities within centres	Immediate: 2009	AEOs	Staff clearly understand management structures within AETCs
4.	Increased staff support activities	Staff feel better supported	Ongoing	AEOs / programme/service coordinators	Increased range of supports for staff Staff are better supported in their work

	Actions Identified	Output	Timescale	Responsibility	Evidence
5.	AES to explore ways to create further links between AES and other sections of the VEC (e.g. schools)	Closer links developed with schools	Ongoing	AEOs / Principals / EO / CEO / SDT	Increased links between schools and AES
6.	Address equality issues such as homophobia amongst students and staff	<p>Equality awareness training for students and staff:</p> <p>Provision of general equality training</p> <p>Provision of specific equality training (e.g. gender, disability, ethnicity, homophobia etc.)</p> <p>Proofing of policies to include above issues</p>	Ongoing: 2009 2010 2011	AEOs / programme/service managers	<p>All AES staff have completed equality awareness training</p> <p>Students and staff are more aware of issues such as homophobia; such issues are not tolerated in the AES; discrimination related to such issues is reduced</p>
7.	AES staff to share experiences and best practice re equality training with other VEC staff	All staff within VEC have clearer understanding of equality issues	Ongoing: 2009 2010 2011	EO / AEOs	Best practice shared between all sections of the VEC
8.	Explore the provision of in-service training (e.g. basic counselling skills/listening ear) for volunteer literacy tutors	Provision of in-service training for volunteer literacy tutors	Ongoing: 2009 2010 2011	AEO / Basic Education Organiser / ALOs	Volunteer literacy tutors have access to in-service training (e.g. basic counselling skills/listening ear)
9.	Provision of literacy awareness training for all staff	Staff made aware of literacy issues relating to students on different programmes and are sensitive to the needs of students	Ongoing: 2009 2010 2011	Programme/service coordinators / Basic Education Organiser / ALOs	All staff have completed literacy awareness training and show greater sensitivity around this issue

	Actions Identified	Output	Timescale	Responsibility	Evidence
10.	Explore increased/improved integration of programmes and services within AES	Greater integration of AES programmes and services Improved level of access, transfer and progression between programmes for students	Ongoing	AEOs / Senior Staff Team	Increased level of integration of programmes and services within AES
11.	Continued provision of Irish language training for AES staff	Staff are able to conduct (elements of) work through the medium of Irish	Ongoing	AEOs / VEC	Greater number of staff within AES proficient in Irish
12.	Provision of AES Equality Statement and information with all job applications	All job applicants receive information from AES on its equality stance	Ongoing	AEOs in partnership with HR	General public are aware of AES stance on equality issues

6.4 PARTNERSHIP

	Actions Identified	Output	Timescale	Responsibility	Evidence
1.	Explore the need for more localised inter-agencies forums	Increased knowledge of education and training activities and initiatives in the county and improved partnership arrangements	Ongoing	AEOs / Adult Education Board	Inter-agency work examined by Adult Education Board
2.	Develop guidelines for best practice re working in partnership with external agencies / organisations	AES staff / external agencies and organisations are aware of best practice re partnership work	1 year: 2009	AEOs / Senior Staff Team / Adult Education Board	Guidelines developed for working in partnership with external agencies / organisations
3.	Provision of structured network meetings for community education providers	Facilitation of knowledge sharing between community education providers/ improvement in quality of community education provision	Ongoing: 2009 (x 2) 2010 (x 2) 2011 (x 2)	AEO / Community Education Facilitator in partnership with the Community Education Forum	Two network meetings held annually
4.	Basic Education Service to explore continuing and increasing family learning programmes	Provision of family learning programmes to assist parents	Ongoing	Basic Education Coordinator / ALOs	Continued and increased provision of family learning programmes

	Actions Identified	Output	Timescale	Responsibility	Evidence
5.	Sharing of data from Equality Impact Assessment Evidence Report with representative groups	Data shared with interested groups for wider use throughout Co. Donegal	Immediate: February 2009	AEOs	Data circulated to all interested groups
6.	Making information available in centres relating to each of the equality grounds e.g. support organisations	Staff and students have access to information regarding other organisations / support services relating to each of the nine equality grounds	Ongoing	Centre/Programmes Directors/Coordinators	Information (e.g. support groups) regarding each of the nine equality grounds is available in centres

6.5 IMAGE, IDENTITY AND PROMOTION

	Actions Identified	Output	Timescale	Responsibility	Evidence
1.	Comprehensive promotion of AES programmes and services to the general public, local communities, employers and other educational establishments etc. throughout the county	Better communications strategy within the county	3 years: 2009-2011	AEOs / centre/programme managers / AES staff	Range of promotion methods used including local radio (news and regular features), VEC website / better branding of Service
		Guidelines developed for staff re marketing / branding of AES / programmes/services	1 year: 2009	Senior Staff Team / AEOs	Guidelines developed
		Branded signage outside all buildings with Adult Education programmes and services taking place	2 years: 2009 2010	AEOs / programme/service / centre coordinators	Visible branded signage outside all AES buildings
		Each programme / service / AETC / centre to host an annual open day / showcase/celebration	Annual: 2009 2010 2011	Programme/service/centre coordinators	A number of annual open days / showcase/celebration events held across the county
		Use of personal stories from current/past students to highlight benefits of AES and programmes/services and attract students	Ongoing – all programmes and services	All programme and service/centre coordinators	Use of personal stories through a range of media – newspapers, radio, talks (e.g. at open days), leaflets, booklets, annual reports etc.
		Directly target the most educationally disadvantaged		All programme & service /centre coordinators	

Actions Identified	Output	Timescale	Responsibility	Evidence
	<p>AES section of VEC website redesigned to be brighter, more attractive and more user friendly</p> <p>VEC website updated regularly re AES programmes and services (e.g. by designating one web-site communications officer per programme/centre or for the Service overall) / VEC website/AES section as homepage</p> <p>An AES presence created on Facebook, MySpace, Bebo and YouTube</p> <p>Compulsory use of correct signature by all staff with corporate emails to include 'Staff name, Job Title, Co Donegal VEC, Adult Education Services, Programme Name'</p>	<p>1 year: 2009</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Immediate effect, completed within one month (end of January 2009)</p>	<p>AEOs / programme coordinators / VEC IT Section</p> <p>AES Staff – specific staff member to take over this responsibility re VEC website</p> <p>AEOs/Senior Staff Team</p> <p>AEOs / all staff with corporate email addresses</p>	<p>Increased traffic to AES section of website (website counter in AES section)</p> <p>Promotion of VEC/AES website on all brochures / booklets / letters / all AES computers (VEC website/AES section as homepage)</p> <p>Increased awareness of AES programmes and services through website</p> <p>Increased awareness of AES programmes and services through website</p> <p>Increased awareness of AES programmes and services through emails</p>

Actions Identified	Output	Timescale	Responsibility	Evidence
	Bi-annual (external) newsletter	Ongoing – twice a year (January & September) to begin in 2010	Senior Staff	Two newsletters per year circulated widely to public services centres, libraries, staff networks etc and via email (pdf version)
	Access, transfer and progression better understood by the general public, AES and VEC staff	Ongoing	AEOs / Senior Staff Team (specialised marketing advice may need to be sought to assist with this)	Improved marketing/branding of service
	NFQ clearly displayed in all AETCs / centres for education	Immediate: February-June 2009	Programme/service coordinators	NFQ displayed in all centres
	Promotion of FETAC accreditation on both sides of the border	Ongoing	All AES staff but particularly those responsible for liaising with employers and other external stakeholders VEC senior management FETAC	Better understanding and acceptance of FETAC by employers, educationalists and the general public
	Production of prospectus detailing programmes and services and clearly explaining access, transfer and progression routes and FETAC/NFQ	Annual	Senior Staff Team	Annual prospectus available (in accessible formats) outlining AES programmes and services

Abbreviations:

AEO	Adult Education Officer
AES	Adult Education Service
AETC	Adult Education & Training Centre
ALOs	Adult Literacy Organisers
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
DES	Department of Education & Science
EO	Education Officer
FETAC	Further Education and Training Awards Council
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
SDT	Strategy Development Team
VEC	Vocational Education Committee

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Appendix 2 Focus Groups / Equality Impact Assessment Consultation Stakeholders

1. 03 November Co Donegal VEC Strategy Development Team
(9 staff: 6 females, 3 males)
2. 04 November STTC Students
(15 students: 11 female, 4 male)
3. 04 November Youthreach Students
(17 students: 6 female, 11 male)
4. 04 November Adult Students
(16 students: 12 female, 4 male)
5. 05 November Adult Students
(12 students: 4 female, 8 male)
6. 06 November Adult Education Service Staff
(36 staff: 33 females, 3 males)
7. 06 November Adult Education Board / External Stakeholders
(12 representatives: 4 females, 8 males)
8. 13 November Literacy Volunteers
(7 volunteers: 4 females, 3 males)
9. 14 November Community Education Providers
(21 providers: 19 females, 2 males)
10. 17 November Adult Education Senior Staff Team
(7 staff: 5 females, 2 males)
11. 11 December Equality Impact Assessment Consultation Stakeholders
(* participated in roundtable discussion)
 - 1) Letterkenny Women's Centre
 - 2) Donegal Women's Network *
 - 3) Second Chance Education Project for Women *
 - 4) Carers Association *
 - 5) People With Disabilities Ireland *
 - 6) Aware North West *
 - 7) Asylum Seekers Support Group *
 - 8) OPEN
 - 9) Teen Parents Support Group
 - 10) GLEN
 - 11) Donegal Travellers Project
 - 12) Derry & Raphoe Action Group
 - 13) Voice of Older People Donegal Limited *
 - 14) HSE West
 - 15) Downstrand Family Resource Centre
 - 16) LGBT Society, Letterkenny Institute of Technology
 - 17) Noel Bradley, Facilitator (Community/Men's Issues) *
 - 18) Cathal Kelly, Development Officer, The Equality Authority *

Appendix 3 Relevant Legislation & Policy Papers

Legislation

- Education Act, 1998
- Employment Equality Act, 1998
- Qualifications (Education & Training) Act, 1999
- Equal Status Act, 2000
- Education Welfare Act, 2000
- Protection of Employees (Part-Time Workers) Act, 2001
- Teaching Council Act, 2001
- The Children's Act, 2001
- Vocational Education (Amendment) Act, 2001
- Protection of Employees (Fixed-Term Work) Act, 2003
- Official Languages Act/Acht na dTeangacha Oifigiula, 2003
- Equality Act, 2004
- Health, Safety and Welfare at Work Act, 2005

Policy Papers

- Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education, 2000

Appendix 4 Equality Impact Assessment – Evidence Report

COUNTY DONEGAL VOCATIONAL EDUCATION COMMITTEE
EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT
ADULT EDUCATION SERVICE'S REVIEW AND ACTION PLAN

EVIDENCE REPORT
November 2008

This evidence report is provided in support of the work undertaken by County Donegal Vocational Education Committee (VEC) to Equality Impact Assess the Adult Education Service's Review and Action Plan.

The report provides information and data relevant to the task and covering each of the equality grounds presently covered by legislation as follows:

- gender
- marital status
- family status
- age
- disability
- sexual orientation
- religion
- ethnicity
- membership of the Traveller community

Whilst not exhaustive, the report attempts to highlight relevant evidence from a state and county perspective. The information has been sought in relation to general demographics, education, employment and any other aspect that is considered relevant to the situation and experience of people who may face discrimination and disadvantage as a result of one or more of the stated equality grounds.

Where quantitative data has not been available, there is a greater reliance on qualitative research, studies and community-based activity.

The report has not made reference to national strategies or action plans, relevant reports and associated recommendations concerning the sector nor relevant guidance, quality assurance frameworks, inspection reports and the like. Nevertheless, this working context for the VEC and its Adult Education Services provides a useful framework for considering the range of responses available to it in developing the next phase of its Adult Education Services.

1 GENDER

1.1 In County Donegal the population of 147,264 is made up of 73,970 men (50.2%) and 73,294 women (49.7%) and the state's population of 4,239,848 by 2,121,171 men (50.03%) and 2,118,677 women (49.97%).

1.2 For each age group until 65+, there is a slightly larger number of men to women:

Below 15	20.9% to 19.9%
15-24	15.1% to 14.7%
25-44	32.2% to 31.3%
45-64	22.1% to 21.8%

1.3 At which point the balance shifts:

65-84	10.7% women to 9.1% men
85+	1.6% women to 0.7% men

CSO Census 2006

1.4 A greater proportion of women than men were educated to third level or higher at 32.8% and 28.7% respectively. These figures have increased dramatically since 1991 when similar achievement was 12.7% and 14.4% respectively.

1.5 A greater proportion of men than women were educated to primary level or less, 21.4% and 19.4% respectively.

CSO Census 2006 Equality in Ireland

1.6 Early school leavers are three times more likely to be unemployed than to be in employment when compared to all persons of the same age group. Male early school leavers are more likely than their female counterparts to be unemployed: 18.1% compared to 13.3%.

1.7 In 2005, 9.4% of women respondents and 6.5% of men were defined as life-long learners (persons aged 25 to 64 in receipt of education (either formal or non-formal) in the four weeks prior to the survey). Women were more likely than men to be life-long learners whether in employment (68,900/57,700), unemployed (2,400/1,900) or not economically active (30,100/12,100).

CSO QNHS 2006 Educational Attainment

1.8 In 2005, around 95% of Leaving Certificate students taking higher level engineering, 94% taking construction studies and 91% taking technical drawing examinations were male whereas over 71% of higher level biology candidates were female. There were higher proportions of women than men taking English and European languages at higher level.

1.9 In 2005, the proportion of female early school leavers in the 18-24 age group in Ireland (9.3%) was much lower than the proportion of male early school leavers (14.5%). Both these proportions were lower than the EU averages of 13.1% for women and 17.3% for men.

CSO Women and Men in Ireland 2006

- 1.10 25.1% of women stayed in school beyond 18 compared to 18.6% of men. A higher percentage of women also attained third level qualifications, 26% compared to 17.9%.
- 1.11 Education ceased at under 15, for 22.8% of men (11,364) in the county compared to a state figure of 12.2% (174,128). For women, the proportion whose full-time education ceased before 15 years of age was lower than for men at 18.5% (9,050) but still well above the national figure of 10.4% (148,217).
- 1.12 The highest level of education completed for 31.2% (15,539) of men in the county was primary including no formal education. This compares with the state figure of 18.8%. For women in the county, this level of achievement was 26.5% (12,936) compared to 17.2% nationally.

County Donegal Draft Factsheet Number Seven: Education Levels and Qualifications

- 1.13 In the period 1998 - 2006 the number of women in the labour market has increased with their employment rate rising from 39.7% to 42.4% and their unemployment rate increasing from 37.7% to 39.5% over the same period.

CSO Census 2006 Equality in Ireland

- 1.14 Early signs of the impact of the economic downturn were reported in the second quarter of 2008. Male full-time employment fell by 19,500 in the year while female full-time employment increased by 15,200. The largest decreases in full-time employment were recorded in the male-dominated sectors such as construction which saw a drop of 26,500.

CSO Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) Quarter 2 2008

- 1.15 In 2006, County Donegal had the highest unemployment rate in the state, 12.9% compared to the state average of 8.5%.
- 1.16 57.8% of men are at work in the county compared to 66% nationally. For women the figure drops to 41.8% considerably lower than the national average of 48.5%.
- 1.17 Unemployment rates for men and women are 14.4% and 10.8% respectively compared to 8.8% and 8.1% nationally.
- 1.18 After the at work category, the largest proportion of women of working age are classified as looking after home/family with 25.6% in this group compared to 21.8% nationally. The comparable group for men is 1.4% and 1% nationally. This goes some way to explain why 46% of working age women are in the labour force compared to 52.8% nationally.
- 1.19 For men the figures are 67.5% in the labour force in the county compared to 72.3% nationally. This is explained by the larger proportion of men in Donegal who are retired, 15.5% compared to 12.3% and those who have a disability, 6.3% compared to 4.2%.

County Donegal Draft Factsheet Number Six: Employment and Unemployment 2008

- 1.20 The workforce participation rate for men in the county was 67.5% compared to a state rate of 72.3%. For men not in the labour force the figures were 32.5% and

27.7% respectively. Unemployed men accounted for 14.4% whereas at state level the figure was 8.8%.

- 1.21 For women the picture is more sharply divided with 46.9% in the labour force against a state average of 52.8% and a total of 53.1% were not in the labour force compared to 47.25 nationally. Unemployment was also higher for women in Donegal with 10.8% unemployed compared to the national figure of 8.1%.

Co Donegal Draft Factsheet Number Six

- 1.22 Across all sectors of the economy, employees earned an average of €19.47 per hour in March 2006. Men earned €20.59 and women earned €18.22. The survey results show that the median earnings figure was €15.39 per hour – i.e. half of all employees earned less than €15.39. For men, the median earnings figure was €16.34; and, for women, it was €14.31 per hour.

- 1.23 In all sectors, men earned more than women. The greatest percentage difference was in education where men earned €41.67 per hour and women received, on average, two thirds this amount.

- 1.24 Average hourly earnings in the public sector were 49% higher than the private sector. Hourly earnings in the public sector were €26.08, compared with €17.48 in the private sector. Women's hourly earnings in the public sector were 85.2% of men's hourly earnings. In the private sector women's hourly earnings were approximately 82.1% of men's. The average working week was 33.5 hours in the public sector and 35.2 hours in the private sector.

CSO National Economic Survey (NES) 2006

- 1.25 The employment rate for women in Ireland in 2006 at 58.8% exceeded the EU Stockholm Council 2005 target of 57%. The employment rate for men in Ireland in 2006 was 77.3%, well above the average EU (2005) rate of 71.3%.

- 1.26 The Stockholm Council also set employment rate targets of 50% for men and women in the 55-64 years age group in 2010. Ireland already exceeds the male target (68.4% in 2006) but is considerably below the female target for the 55-64 age group (40.8% in 2006). However the female employment rate for this age group has almost doubled over the period 1996-2006 and in 2005, at 37.4%, was above the EU average of 33.7%.

- 1.27 Women represented 84% of primary school teachers and 51% of primary school management personnel in 2004. In the health service, women represented 79.6% of all staff in 2006, but only 29.3% of medical and dental consultants.

CSO Women and Men in Ireland 2006

- 1.28 Gender accounted for 18% of Employment Acts cases.
Equality Authority Annual Report 2007

- 1.29 Some 12% of both women and men reported experiencing discrimination. 18.3% of respondents experienced discrimination in the workplace.

- 1.30 21% of women and 18.5% of men stated they had no understanding of their rights under equality law.

CSO QNHS Q4 2004 Equality Module

- 1.31 The average age of mother for first child in 2002 in Donegal was 26.4 years of age, in the State was 27.9 years of age. In 2006 the age in Donegal was 27.5 years of age and in the state was 28.7 years of age.

Co Donegal Draft Factsheet Number Three: Age and Marital Status

2 MARITAL STATUS

2.1 Most people in Donegal as in the state are single with 52.8% locally and 54.7% in the state. 56.2% of men in the county (41,638) are single and 49.3% of women (36,163). This compares with national data as follows: 57% of men are single compared to 51.9% of women.

2.2 There are 28,600 (38.6%) married men in the county and 28,559 (38.9%) married women. This compares at state level with 37.3% of men married and 36.6% of women.

2.3 The proportion of women separated in the county 2.68% is slightly higher than that for men at 1.97%. Similarly there were 1,046 divorced women or 1.4% of all women compared to 839 men or 1.1% of all men in the county.

CSO Census 2006 Volume Two: Age and Marital Status

2.4 Since 2002, the proportion of those single or married has risen both at county and state levels, The percentage change in Donegal has been 6.3% and 7.2% respectively whilst at state level the increases have been slightly larger at 8.2% and 7.6%.

2.5 However, the proportion of those separated at county level has increased by 34.2% compared to a national figure of 24.6%.

Co Donegal Fact sheet Number One: Principal Demographic Results

2.6 The proportion of private households in the county whose composition includes a stated married couple was 54.6% compared to the state figure of 49%.

Co Donegal Draft Fact Sheet Number Four: The Composition of Households and Families in Donegal

2.7 Since 1991, the proportion of persons aged 15 and over who are single has increased from 38.8% to 43.1% whilst over the same period the proportion of those married has decreased from 53.7% to 46.4%.

2.8 The proportion of groups defined by religion to be married is 'Other Christian' 53.1% 'Other Stated Religion' 50% and Roman Catholic 46.9%.

2.9 The largest group defined by ethnicity to be single is 'Other including Mixed' and to be married 'Black or Black Irish' 59.6%.

2.10 Nationally, employment rates have increased considerably for those who are married. In 1981, the rate was 46.2% whilst in 2006 the figure had risen to 61.6%.

2.11 After a considerable decline in employment for those defining themselves as single (from 55.5% in 1981 to 45.9% in 1991) the employment rate increased again by 2006 to 57.5%.

- 2.12 Whilst most single men (43.3%) and women (52.2%) work 30-39 hours per week, most married men (42.3%) work 40+ hours and most married women (39.9%) work 30-39 hours.
Equality in Ireland 2007
- 2.13 5.1% of households in Donegal comprise of cohabiting couples compared to the state figure of 8.1%.
Co Donegal Draft Factsheet Number Four: The Composition of Households and Families 2008
- 2.14 Marital status case files accounted for 1.4% of all employment cases.
Equality Authority Annual Report 2007

3 FAMILY STATUS

- 3.1 In 2006 there were 50,415 private households in Donegal.
- The most commonly found composition at state or county level was “Husband and wife with children” with 35.7% in Donegal and 32.5% in the state overall.
 - There were more households in the county occupied by one person 23.4% against 22.4% nationally.
 - Proportionately there were more married couple households in Donegal, 54.6% compared to 49% at state level.
 - There were more cohabiting couples at state level with 4.4% compared to 2.5% in the county.
 - There were 11.6% of households headed by a lone parent at state level and 12.3% at the county level.

Co Donegal Draft Factsheet Number Four: Composition of Households 2006 Carers

- 3.2 In 2006, there were 100,214 female carers (62%) and 60,703 male in the state. 56% of all carers identified at work as their primary economic status.

- 3.3 In 2006, there was a total of 90,544 carers who were also in employment, an increase from the 2002 census figure of 85,154. This figure consisted of 49,557 women carers or 49.5% of all female carers who were also at work. For men, the figures were 40,987 and 67.5% of all male carers.

CSO Census 2006 Volume 11 disability, Carers and Voluntary Activity

- 3.4 In 2005, 81.1% of those in receipt of Carer’s Allowance and Carer’s Benefit were women.

- 3.5 The HeSSOP (2001) study found that 44% of the older people interviewed reported receiving help from one or more informal carers on a regular basis. On average, 21% of the sample of older people received a high level of informal help from one or more people.

- 3.6 This study also found that spouses or partners and other relatives living in the household provided a great deal of help, namely 25% and 26% respectively. Relatives who lived elsewhere provided support for 24% of respondents, while neighbours provided 12% of the sample with support.

- 3.7 Of the sample of older people in the HeSSOP (2001) study, 8% reported that they were carers themselves. Around two thirds of these carers were women, and 13% of them were over 80 years old.

- 3.8 Based on current morbidity patterns, population growth and care provisions, between 100,000 and 110,000 older people will require home care by the year 2011, an increase of 30% on the corresponding figures for 1996. This will increase further if the Department of Health’s target of at least 90% of persons aged 75 years or more living in their own homes is achieved. According to the Council’s population projections, there will be an extra 64,000 people over 75 years living in the community, if this target is reached.

Carers: Ageing in Ireland Factfile Number Nine National Council on Ageing and Older People

- 3.9 In Donegal 52% of carers provide 1-14 hours per week and 30% of carers provide over 43 hours per week.
- 3.10 These figures are comparable with those at state level suggesting that more carers provide more support at the local as opposed to national level. 58% 1-14 hours and 25% providing over 43 hours per week.
- 3.11 60% of male carers at national level provide 1-14 hours per week and 23% provide over 43 hours. There are slightly fewer women providing 1-14 hours at 57%, however, there are more 27% providing longer hours.
- 3.12 In Donegal a similar picture emerges, with 2148 men (54%) providing 1-14 hours and 27% provide over 43 hours. By comparison, 3550 women (50%) provide 1-14 hours per week and 32% provide over 43 hours.

CSO Census 2006 Vol 11 Disability, Carers and Voluntary Activities

- 3.13 The number of carers in the county in 2002 was 5361 against a state average per county of 4375. The total number of hours per week of unpaid work provided by these carers was 147,838 in the county compared to 104,616 across all counties. The total estimated cost of this was €88.70 million compared to the average cost across all counties of €62 million.

Carers Association Budget Issues 2008

- 3.14 Family status cases accounted for 0.83% of employment related case files in 2007.

Equality Authority Annual Report 2007

- 3.15 13.8% of respondents experienced discrimination using transport services. 10.1% experienced discrimination whilst looking for work and 8.2% experienced discrimination in the workplace.

CSO QNHS Q4 2004 Equality Module

Lone Parents

- 3.16 Of the lone parents identified through the census, 102,600 were female and 10,300 were male. In Donegal the total number of lone parents was 6857.
- 3.17 In 2005 97.8% of those in receipt of one parent family payments were women.
- CSO Women and Men in Ireland 2006**
- 3.18 Employment rates for women as lone parents was 53.1%. For women as other parents, the rate was 59%. The respective figures for men is 72.3% and 89.2%.
- 3.19 66% of lone parents were between 25-44 years old, 8% were people with a disability and 3% were black or black Irish.
- 3.20 23.4% of women who are lone parents have achieved third level education as opposed to women as other parents who achieved a figure of 36.8%. For men the respective figures are 21.2% and 32.1%.

- 3.21 Of the carers, 45% were aged between 45-64, 12% had a disability and 28% were single.
- 3.22 For women with children aged 4-5 years old the employment rate was 55.3%. The lowest employment rate for males was 90.5% for those with children aged 6-17. The highest employment rate for women was 89.2% when there was no children.

Equality in Ireland 2007

- 3.23 Childcare was named in every group as an issue. Overall the availability of childcare for women was greatly appreciated, however, this was available on an ad-hoc basis and you were seen as lucky if you were able to avail of it. Many people knew of women who were not able to access education due to childcare costs.

Community Education and Social Change Qualitative Research Exploring the Current Nature of Community Education in Donegal Community Education Forum, Co Donegal VEC (2008)

4 AGE

- 4.1 Overall since 1981, there has been a gradual decrease in the proportion of the young people in the population. In 1981 the under 15s accounted for 30.3% of the population compared to 20.4% in 2006. 25-44 year olds represented 24.3% of the population in 1981 and now account for 31.7%.
- 4.2 Most 15-24 year olds are single (43%), most 25-44 year olds are single (43.3%), most 45-64 year olds are separated/divorced (54.3%) and most 65-84 year olds are widowed (60.5%).
- 4.3 There has been an increase in the proportion of each age group within work since the last census in 2002. The proportion of 15-24 year olds in employment has increased from 38.5% to 39.5%; for 25-44 year olds from 75.3% to 78.8%; but the largest increase has been amongst 45-64 year olds from 57.5% to 63%.

CSO Equality in Ireland 2007

- 4.4 The population of County Donegal is getting older with the proportion of those over 65 years higher than in the State (12.5% versus 11.4%). In addition, the percentage change in the population aged between 60 – 64 years of age increased by a staggering 21.2% in County Donegal compared to 17.8% in the State as a whole. This figure is important, as it is an early indication of the increasing demand for services for the older person in the future.
- 4.5 In addition the county has a higher percentage of its population falling into the 0-15 age category than in the State (7.4% compared to 6.8%), therefore it is not surprising that Donegal has a higher Age Dependency Ratio than in the State (35.2 to 33.3).

Co Donegal Draft Factsheet Number One: Principal Demographic Results 2006

- 4.6 However, the county has a smaller percentage of its population that can be classified as “*young adults*” than in the State, (5.1% versus 6.1%). In Donegal, there are more young males than females in this age group (5.4% males versus 4.9% females).
- 4.7 Overall, the proportion of people aged between 15 – 65 years of age is lower in the county than in the State, 65.6% compared to 69.5%. The county also has a lower percentage of its population falling into the early working age category (20-34 years of age) 20.5% in the county compared to 25.1% in the State.

Co Donegal Draft Factsheet Number Three: Age and Marital Status 2006

- 4.8 County Donegal has 23.4% (11816 households) of its total private households comprising of one person, of which 5058 households (or 42.8%) comprise of an older person living alone. In addition the State had 22.4% of its total households comprising of one person, of which 121157 (or 36.8%) comprised of an older person living alone.

Co Donegal Draft Fact Sheet Number Four: Composition of Households and Families

- 4.9 Those reaching third level education have generally increased since the last census in 2002. The proportion of 25-44 year olds has increased from 33.1% to 37.7% in 2006. Similarly, those in the 45-64 age range have increased their educational achievement from 17.7% to 21.4%.

- 4.10 The proportion of 65-84 year olds reaching third level and beyond has increased from 9.1% to 11.6% as has the 85s and over who have gone from 6.8% to 8.3%.

Co Donegal Draft Factsheet Number Six: Employment and Unemployment

- 4.11 Census 2002 results show that 48% of those in the 65-69 age group had completed primary level education only, with just 8% having completed tertiary education to Degree level or higher. However, it should be noted that the 2004 Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) reported that almost a third of those questioned aged 60 and over had received 'informal education' during the preceding twelve months. Sources of informal education included professional books and magazines, followed by educational broadcasting, library visits and the Internet.

**An Age Friendly Society: A Position Statement
National Council on Ageing and Older People 2005**

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

**National Report on Life Long Learning
Educational Disadvantage Centre St Patrick's College 2008**

- 4.13 In terms of employment, the greatest proportion by age group employed is the 25-44 year olds with an employment rate of 78.8% in 2006, up from 75.3% in 2002. Again overall employment rates by age range have increased over the past four years to give an overall national employment rate of 57.2% up from 53.1% in 2002.

- 4.14 At a county level, whilst the overall unemployment rate is 12.9% it reaches 17.8% for those over 55 years of age. This compares with state figures of 8.5% and 13.2% respectively.

Co Donegal Draft Factsheet Number Six: Employment and Unemployment

- 4.15 According to Census 2002, 6% of those aged 65 and over participate in the labour force. Council research undertaken in 2000 on preferences for employment and retirement among older people aged 55-69 years found that many of them wished to change their employment status: 70% of those working expressed a preference to retire more gradually than is the current norm, 37% wished to retire as soon as possible, while 26% of the non-employed (those retired, in home duties and others) wished to take up paid work.

An Age Friendly Society: A Position Statement

National Council on Ageing and Older People 2005

- 4.16 The gender pay gap was narrower for younger workers. For those aged under 25, males earned €12.13 while earnings for females were around 3% lower at €11.80 per hour. For those aged 25 to 29, men's earnings of €16.64 per hour was 0.5% less than women's earnings of €16.73 per hour. The difference between male and female earnings was around 7% for employees in their thirties, and between 18% and 24% for older age groups.

CSO NES 2006

- 4.17 Overall, the picture which emerges is of young people perceiving themselves as being seen in a very negative light by adults, and perceiving their treatment at the hands of adults as being unequal and unfair.

Inequality and the Stereotyping of Young People

Maurice Devlin Equality Authority 2006

- 4.18 At 24.2% of all case files, Age was the most common equality strand under the employment acts. Cases under the Equal Status Acts accounted for 11.3% of cases over the same period.

Equality Authority's Annual Report 2007

- 4.19 17.6% of 18-24 year olds had experienced discrimination compared to 6.3% of those 65 and over.

- 4.20 31.8% of respondents experienced discrimination when looking for work and a further 15.9% experienced it at work.

- 4.21 10.6% experienced discrimination using transport services.

- 4.22 24.1% of 18-24 year olds and 27.5% of over 65s reported having no understanding of their rights under equality law.

- 4.23 17.5% and 16.8% respectively of 25-44 year olds and 45-64 year olds claimed to have no understanding.

CSO QNHS Q4 2004 Equality Module

5 DISABILITY

- 5.1 In the Census 2006, 9.3% of the population as a whole identified themselves as having a long-term illness or disability. In County Donegal, 14,981 individuals or 10.2% of the population identified themselves as having a long-term illness or disability. Men and women were evenly represented at 10.2%.
- 5.2 The number of disabilities per person stands at 2.9 in the county compared to a state average of 2.8.
- 5.3 The most common disability at county level is a condition that substantially limits one or more basic physical activities affecting 50% (45% state) of people with a disability and 17% (16% state) of all disabilities. For women at a county level, the figure is 55% and for men 45%.
- 5.4 People who have difficulty in working or attending school/college account for 38% (36% state) of those with a disability and 13% (13% state) of all disabilities. For women at the county level the figure is 39% and men 38%.
- 5.5 People who have a learning or intellectual disability account for 17% (18% state) of those with a disability. This disability represents 6% (6.3% state) of all disabilities. At county level the figure is 22% for men and 12.5% for women.

- 5.6 Blindness or deafness affects 20% (19.5% state) of people and accounts for 7% (7% state) of all disabilities. For men the figure is 21% and women 20%.

CSO Census 2006 Volume 11 Disability, Carers and Voluntary Activities

- 5.7 Among children aged 0 to 14 years, the number of boys with a disability was far higher than the number of girls, 21,183 compared with 12,073. In every category of disability there were more boys than girls, with the greatest difference in the *learning or intellectual disability* category (13,658 boys compared with 6,391 girls) and the difficulty in *learning, remembering and concentrating* category (14,017 boys compared with 6,575 girls).

CSO Census 2006 Volume 11 Disability, Carers and Voluntary Activity

- 5.8 The total number of people with a disability reaching a Third level education was 16.5% compared to 30.5% for the whole population. There was little difference in performance between men and women with disabilities although the overall population shows a differential of 27.7% for men and 33.2% for women.
- 5.9 The most successful age group in terms of educational attainment was 25-44 year olds of men and women with 28.3% of people with disabilities achieving Third level education as opposed to 42.9% of the population as a whole.

Equality in Ireland CSO 2007

- 5.10 One of the greatest barriers to people with disabilities in accessing the community generally and education specifically is the lack of good quality, reliable, accessible transport. Many areas, especially rural areas do not have systems of accessible public transport. A number of funding sources exist to support people with disabilities to access adult education, including grants for adaptation of premises, and funding for assistance with personal care needs, the

purchase of Assistive Technology (AT), and transport etc, but the majority of these funding sources require a person to be a full-time student for eligibility. The vast majority of people with disabilities accessing education do so on a part-time basis due to the impact of their impairment, and funding needs to be re-structured as a matter of urgency to reflect this. It is also vital that state disability benefits are not affected by receipt of such funding, in order to avoid barriers to inclusion through a 'benefits-trap' system.

National Report on Life Long Learning

Educational Disadvantage Centre St Patrick's College 2008

- 5.11 In Donegal, 6.3% of men and 5.3% of women are unable to work due to long-term illness or disability and at state level, 4.2% and 4% respectively.

Co Donegal Draft Fact Sheet Number Three: Employment and Unemployment

- 5.12 In 2004, 5.3% of those in employment in the Border area had a long-standing health problem or disability compared to 6.3% at state level.

- 5.13 In 2002, 40.1% of people between 15-64 with a long-standing health problem or disability is employed. This figure drops slightly by 2004 to 37.1%.

- 5.14 6.3% of those with a disability were unemployed in 2002 compared with a state figure of 4.2%.

- 5.15 In 2004 the proportion of non-disabled people unemployed increased slightly to 4.9% but for people with disabilities the figure had increased to 7.7%.

CSO QNHS Disability Update Q1 2004

- 5.16 26% of persons with a disability are in the labour force. This breaks down by gender as 33% of men with a disability and 20% of women. This gender gap is even wider for specific disabilities: for men with blindness, deafness or a severe vision or hearing impairment, the participation rate is 33.7% whilst for women with similar disabilities the rate is 17.5%.

- 5.17 Similarly for men with difficulty in working or attending school/college the participation rate is 15.7% compared to women at 8.9%.

- 5.18 Men with a learning or intellectual disability participate at a rate of 33.8% whilst the figure for women is 20.8%.

- 5.19 Men with a psychological or emotion condition have a labour force participation rate of 31.3% whilst the rate for women is 23%.

- 5.20 In terms of educational attainment, for 85% of men, education has ceased compared to 83% of women. For 10% of men their education ceased under 15 years of age whilst for women the figure is 8.8%. 27% of women with a disability are educated to third level and 22.5% of men.

- 5.21 For travel to work, 48% of those over 15 mostly use the car, 12% walk, a further 10.2% use the bus/coach and 9.8% work at or mainly from home. For students between 13-18 years of age, 40% use bus/coach, 30% car

(passenger) and 21% walk. There is little variation for women or men. For students over 19, 29% take the bus, 25% walk 18.4% the car (driver) and 3.3% work at or mainly from home.

3% more women use their own car and 3% more women walk and slightly more men catch the bus.

CSO Census 2006 Volume 11 Disability, Carers and Voluntary Activity

- 5.22 A recent survey of public attitudes towards disability revealed the following:
- Compared to 2001 more respondents are aware of people with disabilities: 71% of respondents knew someone with a disability compared to 48% in 2001.
 - Less than half of respondents (45%) thought people with disabilities were treated fairly in Irish society.
 - 80% believed there were occasions or circumstances when it is all right to treat people with disabilities more favourably than others.
 - Just over half (52%) of respondents thought people with disabilities did not receive equal opportunities in terms of education.
 - 71% thought people with disabilities do not receive equal opportunities in terms of employment.
 - Respondents thought employers would be most willing to employ people with physical disabilities with 32% of respondents giving this response.
 - In relation to education only 36% of respondents agreed that children with mental health difficulties should be in the same school as other children and 21% of respondents said they would object if children with mental health difficulties were in the same class as their child. In terms of employment only 7% of respondents thought employers were willing to employ people with mental health difficulties. Respondents also said they would be least comfortable having people with mental health difficulties as work colleagues. In relation to parenting, only 41% of respondents thought people with mental health difficulties should have children if they wish.
 - Although respondents believe access to buildings and public facilities has improved 92% agreed that more could be done to meet the needs of people with disabilities regarding access to buildings and public facilities.

Public Attitudes to Disability in Ireland 2007 National Disability Authority

- 5.23 16.4% of case files related to disability under the Employment Acts. Disability featured within 35.5% of all Equal Status Act case files.

Equality Authority Annual Report (2007).

- 5.24 Disability is one of the strongest predictors of discrimination risk. People with disabilities were at higher risk across all domains except education. Disability has the strongest effect in the health domain and in transport services, where disabled respondents are over five times more likely to report problems of discrimination. People with disabilities also report a greater incidence of repeat discrimination, with 77 per cent of those who experienced discrimination saying it occurred more than once. Furthermore, of respondents with a disability who reported having experienced discrimination, 35 per cent said the experience had a serious impact on their lives.

The Experience of Discrimination in Ireland: Analysis of the QNHS Equality Module Equality Authority/Economic and Social Research Institute 2008

- 5.25 19.6% of those with a disability had experienced discrimination compared to 11.5% of those with none.
- 5.26 32.1% of those with a disability stated that they had no understanding of their rights under equality law compared to 18.1% of those with no disability.

CSO QNHS Q4 2004 Equality Module

6 SEXUAL ORIENTATION

- 6.1 In the 2002 Census 1300 same-sex couples were identified as compared with 150 couples so identified in the 1996 Census. Two thirds of these were male couples. Research both nationally and internationally would suggest that these figures are an underestimate of the actual numbers of couples as a result of concerns that many lesbian and gay people continue to have about disclosing their sexuality to others due to fear of prejudice and discrimination.
- 6.2 Underestimation can also arise from the nature of the Census itself, which in common with other countries (such as the UK or the US) does not allow a person to record a partner not living in the household. Nor are any questions asked about sexual orientation, which might allow for some estimation of total numbers of lesbian, gay and bisexual people in the population.
(Colley Report). Options Paper: Presented by the Working Group on Domestic Partnership to Tanaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (2006)
- 6.3 2006 census records 2090 same sex couples against a figure of 1300 recorded in 2002.
- 6.4 The Second Commission on the Status of Women reported that research has found that about one in ten (10%) of the population has a homosexual orientation, with this figure occurring across different cultures, contexts, national samples, small scale studies and different time periods. They also noted that in Ireland, as in many other countries, this substantial minority of the population is also largely underground.
(Report of the Second Commission on the Status of Women, 1993)
- 6.5 2.2% of cases under the Employment Acts related to sexual orientation.
The Equality Authority Annual Report 2007
- 6.6% 4.1% of respondents experienced discrimination using transport services.
CSO QNHS Q4 2004 Equality Module
- 6.7 59% of those who had gone to college and 36% of those who had been on training courses experienced isolation, depression, poor self-esteem and harassment and bullying. The majority of those who experienced such problems stated that they were due to being lesbian or gay.
- 6.8 Of those who experienced problems in the course of their education there was a marked reluctance to talk to anyone, least of all school teachers, counsellors, college tutors or training course supervisors.
- 6.9 Few respondents reported direct discrimination in the current place of work or training because of their sexual orientation, but 40% said they had experienced harassment.
- 6.10 Fear of harassment and discrimination at work was high. About two fifths of those currently not 'out' at work thought that disclosure of their sexual orientation would lead to discrimination and or harassment.

- 6.11 Many respondents' job opportunities were severely narrowed because they avoided work for which they were qualified (21%) or categories of work (39%) through fear of discrimination, both of which can lead to downward mobility.
- 6.12 41% of respondents had been threatened with violence because they were assumed to be lesbian or gay.
- 6.13 A quarter of respondents had been punched, beaten, hit or kicked because they were assumed to be lesbian or gay.
- 6.14 The vast majority (84%) of respondents knew somebody who had been verbally harassed, threatened with violence or physically attacked because they were assumed to be lesbian or gay.
- 6.15 81% of respondents said that the possibility of anti-gay harassment had affected their behaviour.
- Poverty: Lesbians and Gay Men - The Economic and Social Effects of Discrimination GLEN and NEXUS Research for CPA 1995**
- 6.16 Research findings on the experiences of lesbians and gay men show:
- An increased risk of psychological stress and negative mental health and well-being associated with anti-gay prejudice, discrimination and isolation.
 - A fear of disclosure - frequently expressed as a reluctance to access professional or other supports.
 - Increased risk of suicide - though this varies considerably according to individual, social, economic and socio-political circumstances.
- Mental Health: Lesbians and Gay Men. Strategies to Promote the Mental Health of Lesbians and Gay Men. (2004) GHS (GLEN) in conjunction with the Northern Area Health Board**
- 6.17 Approximately 20% of those interviewed had experienced violent assaults and none of these had reported the incident to the police. Interviewees also reported incidents of women being intimidated from their homes by harassment.
- 6.18 Perhaps the most insidious impact of homophobia is on the personal development of lesbians as they grow up and establish their self-esteem and identity alongside other children. Many lesbian and bisexual women are left feeling unacceptable to mainstream society.
- 6.19 There appear to be relatively few improvements in the situation of young lesbian and bisexual women in exploring and stating their sexual orientation. They continue to face rejection by their families, discrimination and harassment. The young women felt that the youth services should take their needs into consideration.
- 6.20 In the first instance many women responded in the negative when asked if they had experience of discrimination due to their sexual orientation. After further discussion it was revealed that women were either so closeted that their work colleagues and families were not aware of their sexual orientation or that they had minimised the discrimination they had experienced.
- 6.21 Those who were 'out' at work had mixed experiences. 46% of interviewees

stated they had experienced discrimination at work, ranging from severe harassment to ostracism and isolation.

A Mighty Silence: Report on the Needs of Lesbian and Bisexual Women in Northern Ireland Marie Quiery Lesbian Advocacy Services Initiative 2002

- 6.22 The majority of interviewees who brought up the issue of mental health linked it to their sexuality. However sexual identity in itself is not a cause of mental health or emotional difficulties. Rather, it has been shown that the link between higher rates of mental health problems and being lesbian, gay or bisexual is due to a lack of acceptance of LGB sexuality, fears about or experience of negative reactions and discrimination due to LGB sexuality and isolation from social support networks that have been shown to be protective of health.
- 6.23 There was a general consensus that the reality of everyday life for LGB people in the north west is circumscribed by the challenge of living in a region where there is an assumption that everybody is heterosexual. This pervading assumption resulted in the concealment of LGB sexual identity, the curtailment of behaviour and/or the sense of living an invisible existence for some participants. Feelings of isolation are particularly pronounced for the men who participated in the research.
- 6.24 Self-protection and vigilance are recurring themes with many participants highlighting the consequent psychological and physical toll exacted by constant self-regulatory behaviour. Almost all interviewees associated their mental health difficulties or those of friends and acquaintances with issues relating to LGB sexual identity. Furthermore, 14 interviewees mentioned the likelihood of LGB sexual orientation as a major factor in relation to suicide. Seven research participants had been subjected to explicit homophobic verbal assaults in public, one had experienced physical attack and a number of others lived with the fear of physical assaults.
- 6.25 The experience of interviewees is more positive in relation to the most significant relationships that they have with friends, family and work colleagues. All of the participants had 'come out' to some of their friends, over four-fifths of them had disclosed their sexuality to at least some family members and just under three-quarters had discussed their LGB status with at least some of their work colleagues. In addition, three-quarters of the respondents are socially active in the LGB community and all of them know other LGB people living in the area.
- Recognising LGB Sexual Identities in Health Services The Experiences of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People with Health Services in North West Ireland Equality Authority and Health Service Executive (2007)**
- 6.26 Of 362 young people responding to research carried out in Belfast and the north east around Derry, 65% had experienced verbal abuse at school and 35% physical abuse. 29% had attempted suicide and 26% had self-harmed. 44% experienced bullying at school as a result of their sexual orientation, 33% reported lower than expected exam results and 25% truancy.
- SHOUT - Research into the needs of young people in Northern Ireland who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender (LGBT) YouthNet Department of Education (2003)**

7 RELIGION

- 7.1 In 2006, 87% of the state's population identified themselves as Roman Catholic, 3% Church of Ireland including Protestant, 4.4% no religion and 1.6% not stated.
- 7.2 85% of men and 88% of women identified themselves as Roman Catholic. 5.2% of men indicated that they had no religious affiliation and 3.6% of women.
- 7.3 In County Donegal, 86% of the total population identified themselves as Roman Catholic, 4.5% as Church of Ireland or Protestant, 2.4% no religion and 0.7% not stated.
- 7.4 86% men and 87% women identified themselves as Roman Catholic. 2.8% of men stated that they had no religion and 1.9% of women.
- 7.5 At state level, 32,539 or 0.8% of the population described itself as Muslim. In Co Donegal, 0.25% of the population described itself as Muslim. The Muslim population of the Borders area represents 6.6% of the overall Muslim population in the state. 42% of Presbyterians live in the Borders region and 6.7% of Hindus living in Ireland.
- 7.6 The number of people with a stated religious affiliation increased between 2002 and 2006 from a 2.7% increase in the number of Quakers to 157.5% increase in Apostolic or Pentecostal church.
- 7.7 In 2002, there were 3,152 Apostolic or Pentecostal adherents a figure that had increased to 8,114 by 2006 an increase of 157.5%. There were more women (4,305) affiliated to this religion than men (3,811).
- 7.8 In 2002, there were 10,437 Orthodox and by the time of the next census in 2006, the number of people affiliated to Orthodoxy was 20,798 a 99.3% increase. The total number is roughly shared between men 10,668 and women 10,130.
- 7.9 There were 3,099 Hindus in 2002 and 6,082 in 2006 consisting of 3,715 men and 2,367 women a percentage increase of 96.3%.
- 7.10 In county Donegal of those aged between 15 -64, 86% identified themselves as Roman Catholic and 4.4% as Church of Ireland including Protestant.
- 7.11 23% of those describing themselves as Roman Catholic were under 14 whereas 38% of those describing themselves as Muslim were under 14.
- 7.12 At a state level, the three largest religions by stated affiliation in numerical terms are Roman Catholic, Church of Ireland, including Protestant and Muslim. Of those within these affiliations and over 15 years of age 38%, 40.4% and 38% respectively were out of the labour market.
- 7.13 For Roman Catholics, 56.7% were in work, made up of 65.5% of men and 48.3% of women. For those of the protestant faith, 54.3% were in work made up of 65% of men and 44% of women. And for those of Muslim faith, 45.1% were in work made up of 57.4% of men and 24.1% of women. 58.3% of Muslim women were out of the labour market, of these 35% were looking after home or family.

- 7.14 Whilst Roman Catholics and Church of Ireland affiliates were unemployed at a rate of approximately 5%, the rate for those of Muslim faith was 14.6%, with Muslim women (15.3%) being more likely than men (14.2%) to be unemployed.
- 7.15 The age profile of the Muslim group was underlined by the fact that only 1% was classified as retired compared to 11.7% of Catholics and 15.6% of Church of Ireland adherents.
- 7.16 Catholics had the higher rate of reported disability at 4.4% compared to 3.2% (Church of Ireland) and 2.4% (Muslim).
- 7.17 In terms of gender, the carer profile reflected national figures in so far as over 90% of carers in each faith community were women.
- 7.18 Double the proportion of Muslims were classified as students at 20.5% a figure evenly made up of women and men.

CSO Census 2006 Volume 13 Religion

- 7.19 A study looking at the experience of Border Protestants found the following:
- According to the census of 2002 5% of households in the southern border region are Protestant, with the breakdown for each county ranging from 1% in Louth to 8% in Cavan, Donegal and Monaghan. In total, there are 7636 Protestant households in the six southern border counties.
 - In Donegal the number is 3452, which represents 45% of the total households in the border region. This led to a target number of questionnaires of 450 returns. The actual number of returns was 262 so 58% of respondents came from county Donegal.
 - The 455 questionnaires (returned) represent only a 45% response rate...(which) does not constitute a representative sample of the Protestant population and therefore the findings presented cannot be considered statistically representative of the views of the Protestant population.
 - Notwithstanding, this report does however represent an important presentation of the views of a sample of the Protestant community throughout the border region as there is no other body of information available that captures the views of so many members of the Protestant community in the southern border region.
 - 26% of respondents believe that they would not have equal access to employment opportunities in the statutory sector, 21% do not believe they would have equal access in the community sector and 17% believe that they would not have equal access to employment opportunities in the private sector.
 - 23% of survey respondents reported that they experienced negative discrimination as a result of religious identity. The nature of the discrimination is reported to have been mainly verbal abuse and has occurred primarily in the workplace and within educational establishments.

Border Protestant Perspectives – a study of the attitudes and experiences of Protestants living in the southern border counties LOCUS Management 2005

- 7.20 Religion featured in 2.2% of case files relating to the Employment Acts .
Equality Authority Annual Report (2007).
- 7.21 11% of Roman Catholics had experienced discrimination compared to 21.6% of Other Religions.
- 7.22 18.9% of Roman Catholics knew nothing of their rights under equality law compared with 24.9% of those affiliated to other religions.
CSO QNHS Q4 2004 Equality Module

8 ETHNICITY

- 8.1 At state level, the 'White Irish' population accounted for 87% of the total, a further 7% described themselves as being from an 'Other White' background and 0.5% as being 'Irish Travellers'.
- 8.2 The largest visible minority was 'Other including Mixed' at 1.1% followed by 'African and other Black' at 1.06%, 0.85% describing themselves as 'Other Asian' and 0.4% as being of 'Chinese' background.
- 8.3 In Donegal, 'White Irish' accounts for 92% of the total population with a further 4.8% describing themselves as 'Other White' and 0.25% as 'Irish Travellers'. The largest visible minority was 'Other Including Mixed' at 0.7% and 'African and other Black' at 0.45%, 0.4% 'Other Asian' and 0.1% 'Chinese.'
- 8.4 At a national level, the proportion of children below the age of 15 varies considerably reflecting the experience of different groups. 20.6% of the 'White Irish' community are under 15 whilst 41.44% of Traveller community is. 41% of those describing themselves as 'African and Other Black' are under 15, 27% of 'Other including Mixed', 22% of 'Other Asian' and 12.45% of 'Chinese'.
- 8.5 In the 15-24 age range, the highest proportion of any one ethnic group represented was 32.9% of Chinese compare with 20.5% Irish Traveller, 18.1% Other White, 14.6% White Irish, 14.3% Other Asian and 10.3% Black. For 25-44 year olds, the largest proportion by ethnicity was 55.1% of Other Asian, followed by 50.5% of the Other White, 46.5% of the Chinese, 44.5% of the Black community and 29.7% of White Irish and 25.3% of Irish Travellers.
- 8.6 The age profile of ethnic minorities continues to be reflected within the older groups. The largest proportion of 45-64 year olds was in the White Irish community 23.1% followed by Other White at 15.3%. Irish Traveller at 10.1% and Other Asian at 8.1%, Chinese at 7.1% and Black at 4%. The trend is even more marked for the 65 and over with 12% of white Irish falling into this category followed by 3.8% of Other white, 2.6% of Irish Travellers, 1% of Chinese, 0.8% of Other Asian, and 0.3% of Black.
- 8.7 In terms of educational achievement, Irish Travellers were most likely to reach primary level or less with 77% compared with a national average of 19.1%. The group most likely to achieve third level or higher was Other Asian background at 72.1% compared with a national average of 30.2%.
- CSO Census 2006 Volume Five: Ethnic or Cultural Background (including the Irish Traveller Community)**
- 8.8 The largest employment rates was Other White (79.4%) and the smallest the Chinese (54%) and Irish Traveller (55%) compared with 61% of the White Irish.
- 8.9 41% of the Irish Traveller community were unemployed and 26% of African or other black background compared to 4.6% of White Irish. 45% of the Irish Traveller community described themselves as not in the labour force compared with a national average of 37.5%.

CSO Census 2006 Volume Five: Ethnic or Cultural Background (including the Irish Traveller Community)

- 8.10 Data on nationality of employees was recorded in the 2006 survey. Average hourly earnings were highest for Irish employees at €19.86. Employees from the United Kingdom earned on average €19.62 per hour, which were the highest paid non-Irish employees. The lowest paid were those from the EU Accession States, who earned an average of €11.52 per hour (i.e. 59% of the average for Irish employees). The gender pay gap for Irish and EU Accession States employees was similar, with women earning around 86% to 87% of men's average hourly earnings. However, for 'Other Nationalities', (mainly non-European) women earned nearly 11.6% more than men.

CSO NES 2006

- 8.11 Women migrant workers experience a labour market characterised by gender inequality. Gender gaps exist in pay, conditions of employment, access to promotion and career development, and the participation of women in decision-making. Occupation segregation also exists whereby women are clustered into lower paid and lower skilled jobs. Gender stereotyping can also result in a misrepresentation of migrant women as dependents of migrant men rather than as being financially independent or in misrepresentations in relation to their sexuality.

An introduction to the Situation and Experience of Women Migrant Workers in Ireland Equality Authority 2006

- 8.12 None of those interviewed had children currently studying at third level institutes and it was reported that few people from ethnic minority backgrounds access further or higher education due to employment pressures, childcare problems, transport (especially if classes were at night), costs for non-EU migrants, location and distance to appropriate course.
- 8.13 Very positive experiences were reported of English language classes delivered by the VEC. Bi-lingual information and the commitment of staff were seen as central to this success.
- 8.14 Almost all those interviewed believed that were currently employed below their skills, qualifications and experience and were keen to access further education and training as a means to securing employment.
- 8.15 The problems of racism and integration are clearly on-going concerns with a general feeling that more needs to be done in both combating racist abuse and also providing greater opportunities for community integration and cohesion.
- 8.16 Poverty is regarded by both the ethnic minority community and statutory and voluntary agencies to be a major problem. Minimum and below minimum wages, long hours, the cost of living, high rents and high rental deposits which ensures that many continue to live in overcrowded and poor conditions are all on-going problems.
- 8.17 It is clear from the survey that people are employed in a wide variety of occupations and sectors across Donegal and the surrounding counties including

agriculture, construction, catering, cleaning, manufacturing, retail, hotel and tourism and health care. However, a variety of problems was continually cited including: lack of employment contracts, lack of understanding of signed contracts, below minimum wage earnings, illegal deductions from wages and no pay slips, no overtime payments and a lack of Health and Safety information.

- 8.18 For others, one of the main problems is accessing job opportunities related to their experience and qualifications with a perception that they were the victims of racism when denied jobs for which they have significant qualifications and experience resulting in them remaining in low paid jobs or relying on state benefits.
- 8.19 The lack of readily available information on local services, events and activities has a negative impact on integration and the full uptake of services. There is also a lack of knowledge of rights and entitlements exacerbated by the absence of specialist immigration advice. As suggested above, language barriers play a role through the lack of qualified interpreters (particularly in rural areas), the continued problem of limited literacy skills and the availability of printed information in only a few languages.
- 8.20 There is also a need for training of staff within a variety of agencies and organisations on anti-racism and cultural diversity in order to ensure that service delivery decisions are made without reference to negative attitudes and prejudicial beliefs. This would also encourage an understanding of different cultural beliefs and traditions so that services can be delivered in a culturally sensitive manner.
- 8.21 Women migrants are the main source of physical and emotional support for other family members and carry the main child care responsibilities whilst having difficulty in accessing affordable childcare in order to access employment and educational opportunities. Isolation and loneliness were seen by respondents as one of the greatest problems for migrant women especially if they had left behind children in another country, whilst the nature of some employment was also deemed to be “anti-social”.
- 8.22 It was reported that knowledge of rights and entitlements, as well as training in new skills are essential tools for integrating newly arrived migrants with access to language courses seen as particularly important for women due to restricted access.
- 8.23 The research also highlighted that qualifications and experience not being recognised by potential employers can result in unemployment or employment below the individual’s skills. 65% of men interviewed reported the negative impact of being under-employed on their health and self-esteem.
- Study of Ethnic Minority Communities in Co Donegal Draft Report Trademark(2008)**
- 8.24 There were 403 asylum seekers in Donegal (March 2005) 224 adults and 179 children. The largest numbers of asylum seekers in the region now come from Nigeria, followed by Ghana, a nearly equal mix from other sub-Saharan African and Eastern European countries, and a small number from the Middle East.

Food Nutrition and Poverty among asylum seekers in North West Ireland (2005) CPA HSE University of Galway

- 8.25 Race accounted for 18.9% of cases under the Employment Acts.
Equality Authority Annual Report 2007
- 8.26 The National Consultative committee on Racism and Interculturalism provides an avenue for reporting some of the racist incidents that occur within the state each year. The figures are not intended to be comprehensive and aim to complement published data from the Equality Authority and Garda records as well as highlighting key concerns. For the past three years the committee has recorded 119 such incidents in 2005, 65 incidents in 2006 and 99 incidents in 2007.
Reported Incidents Related to Racism and Strategic Responses from the NCCRI January – June 2008
- 8.27 12% of white respondents reported experiencing discrimination compared with 31.5% of those from an ethnic minority background.
- 8.28 11.5% of Irish nationals had experienced discrimination compared with 24.4% of non-Irish nationals.
- 8.29 Ethnic minority respondents were more likely to face discrimination than any other equality group on more than one occasion, (24% compared to a national average of 8.9%). They were also more likely to face discrimination on only one occasion than any other group (7.6% compared to 3.6%).
- 8.30 28.1% of respondents experienced discrimination using transport services.
- 8.31 23.1% experienced discrimination looking for work and a further 17.4% in the workplace.
- 8.32 42.1% of ethnic minority respondents reported that they had no understanding of their rights under equality law compared to 19.2% of white respondents.
CSO QNHS Q4 2004 Equality Module

9 TRAVELLER COMMUNITY

- 9.1 The census 2002 recorded the traveller population at state level as 23,681. In 2006 this number had reduced to 22435. In Donegal, the totals for 2006 (2002 in brackets) was 365 (389) consisting of 186 (203) men and 179 (186) women.
- 9.2 The rate of population per thousand in the county was 2.5 (2.8) compared with a national rate of 5.3 (6.0). The rate in Letterkenny was 11.3 (9.8) against an average for towns of over 10,000 of 7.9 (9.6).
- 9.3 At a state level, the number of those under 15 years of age remained consistent at 41% in 2006 and 42% in 2002. This compares with a state figure for the population as whole of 20.4%.
- 9.4 In terms of disability, the traveller community reports much higher proportion across all ages than the population as a whole. At state level, 5.8% of the general population between the ages of 25-44 reports a disability, whereas the Traveller community the figure is 31.9% (14.4%).
- 9.5 At state level the proportion of lone parents in the population is 3.3%, for the Traveller community the figure is 8.3%.
- CSO census 2006 Volume 5 Ethnic or Cultural background (including Irish Traveller Community)**
- 9.6 Only 0.6% of men had completed third level education against a population figure of 27.7% whilst for women the figure for Travellers was 1.1% against 33.2% within the population as a whole.
- Equalities in Ireland CSO 2007**
- 9.7 The highest educational attainment for the Traveller community is Primary or less for 77% compared to a state average of 19.1%. 22.2% record secondary with a national figure of 50.7% reaching this level and finally at third level or above 0.8% of Travellers compared to 30.2% of the population overall.
- 9.8 The Traveller community has an employment rate of 13.8% compared to 57.2% for the general population. The gap is larger for men with 16.9% of Travellers in employment compared to 66% of men in the population as a whole. For women, the figures are 11% and 48.5% respectively.
- CSO census 2006 Volume 5**
- 9.9 The study found little evidence of Travellers being identified as potential participants for mainstream programmes. There is also a clear need for greater networking and information sharing between programme providers and Traveller support groups.
- 9.10 The research suggests that Travellers have a variety of perceptions about programmes including a fear of loss of benefits, that programmes will affect their lifestyle and, overall, had negative experiences of programmes. Little is being done to send messages that will highlight the needs of Travellers and manage their concerns. There appears to be little evidence of adapting media to the Traveller context.

- 9.11 The research reveals that Travellers perceive the methods used to select individuals for labour market programmes directly or indirectly discriminate against them. There is also a clear indication for greater needs analysis at both the group and individual level and for greater investment in career planning.
- 9.12 Many of the Traveller participants in this research had positive perceptions about the benefits of training and the resulting increase in self-esteem. However, it is clear that greater efforts are needed to ensure that Travellers are treated with dignity and respect on programmes.
- 9.13 The findings demonstrate that informal evaluation of programmes is common. However, formal evaluation of the suitability of programmes for Travellers was less prevalent in mainstream provision. Critically there is evidence of confusion over who has responsibility to assist Travellers overcome discrimination and ensure positive outcomes in terms of progression from programmes.

Travellers' Experiences of Labour Market Programmes Barriers to Access and Participation Equality Authority 2003

- 9.14 The High Level Group considers that these two projects in particular have confirmed their belief that the solution to the problem of securing better outcomes for Travellers lies locally. It is only by engaging all the relevant agencies in a focused way on the needs of individual sites, estates and even families, that the multiple disadvantages that many Travellers face can be overcome.
- 9.15 Consultation with Travellers has to be made more effective. It is necessary that Travellers be consulted so that their real needs are identified and addressed. However, consultation processes are not ends in themselves and consultation does not convey a veto over proposals.
- 9.16 There is a need to have relevant data to monitor progress in service delivery for Travellers. The two Local Authorities have tried to address the deficiency in data for their own areas. Clare is planning to hold a local census of Travellers, using Travellers as enumerators.

Report of the High Level Group on Traveller Issues 2006

- 9.17 Travellers made up 19% of Equal Status Acts case files and 0.28% of employment related cases.

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Coiste Gairmoideachais Chontae Dhún na nGall
County Donegal Vocational Education Committee



Seirbhísí Oideachais Aosaigh
Adult Education Services

