

**Department of Education and Skills**  
**Community Education Programme**

**Operational Guidelines for Providers**

**2012**

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## **Operational Guidelines Community Education**

### **Purpose**

1. These operational guidelines are for Vocational Education Committee (VEC) staff managing, administering and delivering community education programmes funded by the Department of Education and Skills under the Adult Literacy, Community Education and SPIDAS Scheme (ALCES).
2. These guidelines do not cover the management of programmes delivered by community groups funded under the Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) – these are subject to the terms and conditions of the BTEI as set out in the 2012 BTEI Operational Guidelines.

### **Definition and Scope of Community Education**

3. In Ireland, community education is outside the formal education sector, with the aims of enhancing learning, fostering empowerment and contributing to civic society. It is located in communities which can be area-based or issue-based, or around some other value.<sup>1</sup>
4. There are currently a variety of approaches to community education<sup>2</sup>, but the main one is a ‘hybrid’ approach of a ‘community organisation’ and a ‘community development’ model under which education is delivered in local areas in response to the community’s identified needs; for example, programmes that combat social isolation and foster personal development.
5. The Programme for Government prioritises community education as part of Lifelong Learning, along with adult literacy and vocational training for jobseekers. Community education can transform individual lives and contributes to social cohesion. It enables civil society to play a key role in education with local groups taking responsibility for, and playing a role in organising courses, deciding on programme content and delivering tuition. It provides opportunities for intergenerational learning, builds self-confidence and self-esteem and for those with low skills or a negative experience of formal education. It can provide a stepping stone to further learning, qualifications and rewarding work. The European Commission has also emphasized the key role of civil society in the promotion of adult learning, particularly in cultivating non-formal and informal learning, as well as the need to prioritize learning communities and social networks.

### **Community Education funded by the Department under ALCES**

6. Funding provided by the Department under ALCES for community education is primarily designed to promote and assist local not-for-profit community education groups address the needs of their community, in particular those with limited formal education (see paragraph 18 below). ALCES funded community education may also support action models where groups experience collective development for local or broader social actions. It should provide educational courses that focus on widening participation in learning by adults with

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<sup>1</sup> EU Definition: “Community based adult learning: learning taking place in local communities, delivered by educational providers in collaboration with them” European Commission, 2011, European Adult Learning Glossary.

<sup>2</sup> See AONTAS research 2011, page 194

particular emphasis on reducing educational and social disadvantage. The Community Education fund should complement and support other initiatives and non formal and informal learning activity for adults funded by other Government Departments, including the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, the Department of Social Protection, the Department of Health, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, and the Department of Justice and Defence.

7. VECs should make every effort to promote cooperation and partnership with other local community education initiatives funded through other sources and Government Departments.
- 8. All DES-funded community education programmes should be offered free-of-charge to those who have less than upper second level education and/or who are educationally or socially disadvantaged**
9. Participants may be charged a nominal fee to assist with ancillary costs e.g tea/coffee, room rental etc.

### **Target Groups**

10. Target groups for community education programmes are set out below (as identified in Government and EU policy documents such as the National Action Plan on Social Inclusion), but overall, they include individuals and groups that experience particular and acute barriers to participation in adult learning, in particular those who wish to access learning locally, as a step to more active community involvement or certified learning.
  - Adults with low or no formal qualifications or low literacy levels, especially those with less than upper second level education or NFQ Levels 1-3, or equivalent
  - The unemployed and in particular, the long term unemployed
  - One parent families
  - Travellers
  - Migrants/refugees/asylum seekers
  - Older people
  - People with a disability
  - Disadvantaged women and men, particularly those living in rural isolation or RAPID areas
  - The homeless
  - Ex-offenders
  - Substance misusers
  - Underemployed/sessional and seasonal workers
  - Dependents of those who are unemployed
  - Low skilled people outside the labour force
11. Research has highlighted the need for providers to put in place specific strategies for the inclusion of some very marginalised target groups, including men in rural areas, who are under-represented in current provision. The Education Equality Initiative and AONTAS

research both highlight that groups with strong links to local civil societies and broader community development work should be prioritised and community education services should assist and facilitate local groups to develop such partnerships with other organisations and services. It is acknowledged that intensive outreach work is a key method of attracting learners from such marginalized groups.

12. Within the cohort of unemployed people and in the context of the current high levels of unemployment the following four areas have been identified as a priority by the DES:
  - the low skilled
  - the long term unemployed
  - Under 35s
  - Those formerly employed in construction, retail and manufacturing.

### **Management Structure**

13. The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) has overall responsibility for all VEC activities including community education. The CEO may delegate the management of community education to the Adult Education Officer (AEO) as part of an integrated Adult Education Service which may also include adult literacy, the BTEI, Intensive Tuition in Adult Basic Education (ITABE), DEIS Family Literacy, Skills for Work, the Adult Education Guidance Initiative (AEGI), Youthreach, the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) or the Prison Education Service
14. Any transfer of community education funding to any other programme must have the prior written approval of the Department. Such a decision should be formally recorded in the committee's proceedings and be identified on the Form A2 and Form A3.
15. The AEO is line manager for relevant adult education service managers, including Community Education Facilitators (CEF). CEFs manage the delivery of community education programmes in consultation and co-operation with colleague co-ordinators from the other adult education services. The organisation of community education services and their management by CEFs, e.g., in relation to "catchment areas", is a decision for the CEO.

### **Financial Management**

16. The CEO may delegate the responsibility for the management of the funding allocated under these schemes to relevant adult education service managers, including for community education programmes. The CEO approves allocations for these programmes from within the schemes in consultation with the AEO and relevant adult education service managers. The disbursement of these allocations to relevant adult education service managers is a decision for the CEO. The AEO should agree allocations with relevant service managers from within those approved allocations in line with the highest financial and accounting practices.

17. The community education programme allocation may be used to meet pay and non-pay costs. **Pay Costs** are the costs of pre development work, co-ordination, tuition and administration staff, including CEFs, paid tuition staff and support staff. **Non-pay costs** include equipment and materials, overheads (such as rental) and staff training and/or Continuing Professional Development (CPD). Non-pay costs may also include the limited provision of childcare and guidance input, the latter to be arranged in consultation with the AEGS.
18. **VECs may not spend more than 30% of the community education programme allocation on non-pay costs .**
19. Within the proportions specified at (18) above, the community education portion of ALCES scheme funding may be used to fund community groups to deliver particular community education programmes. Such funding is normally allocated through the provision of tuition hours or small grants but **should always be underpinned by a written agreement, e.g. a service level agreement.** These agreements should specify an agreed volume of tuition for a specific target group in a particular area.
20. In allocating funding to groups under such agreements, the CEF should take into account the level of innovation in the proposal, relevance of the provision to the stated target group, the capacity of the community group to deliver and previous allocations to the community group. The CEF should monitor progress and seek relevant reports from groups so funded to ensure the terms of the agreement are met. These reports should be considered if groups re-apply for funding and as part of annual plans for community education.

### **Staffing Structure**

21. As set out above, the CEF manages the delivery of community education programmes, including any staff. The CEO may approve the appointment of other staff including administrative, caretaking, cleaning and other support staff. In addition, the CEO may allocate a resource worker to work under the direction of the CEF in the development and delivery of the local community education service. A clear rationale and job description, in line with the objectives of the community education programme, should be established for such posts. **The provisions of Circulars 22/2009 and 23/2009 on public sector appointments must be adhered to.**
22. Paid tutors should be recruited in line with best practice and a panel of tutors should be established, with associated subject areas where relevant. With the approval of the AEO and CEO, CEFs should allocate tuition hours in accordance with the panel in the first instance and other factors such as availability in the second. As part of the recruitment and induction process, all paid tutors should be provided with a contract of employment stating their entitlements in accordance with IVEA recruitment guidelines. Paid tutors, as with all other staff employed in the VEC sector, should be Garda vetted.
23. Tutor training has a crucial role to play in community education and CEFs should be actively involved in working collaboratively with community education groups **to support access** to a range of training programmes for tutors, including facilitation and group work skills, community development theory and teaching skills for tutors of adults.

### **Integrated Service Approach at VEC level**

24. There should be specific policies in place at VEC management level to promote a cohesive integrated service approach with regard to all part-time further and adult education programmes, including community education, as this will ensure a focus on strategic planning and avoid duplication. Cohesive integrated programmes of adult learning for geographical areas within the VEC should be developed.
25. The AEO should ensure that a comprehensive plan is in place to ensure that adult education services work co-operatively together on an intra-agency basis. This plan should be developed and agreed with the CEO and relevant members of the VEC senior management team and the AEO should report to the CEO on its implementation on a regular basis. The foundation of such an integrated approach includes communication, information sharing and joint planning and reporting and a formal forum for this should be established.
26. An integrated service model depends on more than 'regular meetings'. Examples of features of such an integrated model include a common database, pre-course placement sessions, operational planning meetings, joint brochures and publicity, common applications processes, cross programme tutor packs, generic course descriptions, outreach meetings and joint assessment of enrolments by coordinators.
27. Community Education staff under the direction of the CEO/AEO should make sure that there is appropriate liaison with local and regional welfare offices to ensure the referral of unemployed people to community education programmes in accordance with Circular 76/2011- Interim Protocol to enable referral of unemployed people to Further Education programmes funded by the Department of Education and Skills.

### **Partnership**

28. The CEF under the direction of the CEO/AEO and in collaboration with other VEC personnel should participate in inter-agency networks and partnerships with other local organisations including key community and voluntary interests, employers, employment services and relevant state agencies. They should plan provision in active collaboration with those local networks, in order to identify and prioritise learning areas of most relevance to the communities that they serve and to ensure the most effective use of funding available. Such partnerships avoid duplication of provision and enable the sharing of knowledge and expertise to identify and engage with diverse groups of adults experiencing educational disadvantage.
29. Publicity and awareness raising as well as promotional work should take place in the broader context of the overall integrated programme for adult learning established for specific geographical areas within each VEC. Such an approach will ensure that adult learners are directed to the service that best suits their needs

### **Community Literacy Strategy**

30. In the context of this integrated service approach, the Community Education Service should work in close cooperation with the Adult Literacy Service to develop a Community Literacy Strategy which promotes non-formal and informal learning opportunities. These initiatives may include, as appropriate, awareness-raising in relation to literacy issues and the integration of opportunities to address literacy and numeracy skills in the context of broader the community education programme.

### **General Principles for Programme Development**

31. In common with other programmes targeting disadvantaged adults, community education programmes should adhere to the following general principles:

- Learner Centredness
  - Equality
  - Accessibility and Inclusiveness
  - Recognising and Accommodating Diversity
  - Quality Assurance
  - Local Consultation and an Area-based Approach
  - Innovation
32. Providers need to be aware of Equality legislation which is designed to counter discrimination on the grounds of gender, marital status, family status, disability, sexual orientation, age, religion, race and membership of the Traveller community. Applied to education, the principle of equality requires that all learners be afforded the opportunity of reaching their potential in their social, cultural, political, economic and other roles. Accordingly, those providing programmes under the Community Education Programme are expected to develop a pro-active strategy or proofing mechanism to target and prioritise those most at risk, e.g. setting out an Equality Checklist. This will assist in optimising learner access to, participation in and benefit from relevant programmes, and in counteracting barriers arising from differences of socio-economic status, gender, ethnicity and disability. Guidelines on Equality Mainstreaming for the VEC sector are available from the Equality Authority: [www.equality.ie](http://www.equality.ie)
  33. As a general principle, community education programmes should start with the lived experience of the participants and be located in their daily family and social lives. Tuition methodologies should focus on facilitation and group work and recognize and support diverse learning needs and styles. There should be a strong focus on fostering self-directed learning, critical thinking and ‘learning to learn’ skills. There should be an active approach to facilitating the individual to manage their own learning. Learners should have opportunities to experience success in their learning endeavour on an on-going basis and achievement should be regularly reinforced by tutors and facilitators. Learners should be encouraged to ‘persist’ in their learning – that is, staff should take stock of the need for adults to ‘dip in’ and ‘dip out’ of programmes, depending on other family and personal commitments. There should be an emphasis on group learning, as well as individual learning, as a support for community cohesion, participation and collective action.

### **Non Accredited Learning**

34. Non accredited provision enables adults to return to the learning process at their own pace, in an informal and comfortable environment where the emphasis is on enjoyment. This type of education provision enables individuals to explore their full potential and to contribute to the social, cultural and economic development of their area, but course activity should take place within an agreed time frame. **As a general principle, accredited learning options should be provided through the BTEI or the Adult Literacy Service.** It may be appropriate to offer some accreditation through the provision of single modules/minor awards but this should be done in consultation with the AEO and CEO as appropriate.
35. The DES will consult with key stakeholders to establish systems for capturing the wider benefits of learning using non-accredited learning as a starting point. The data collected through such qualitative assessment undertaken in conjunction with community education learners may be used to inform planning for future provision, as well as for reporting purposes to the DES. Key areas for inclusion in such frameworks may involve: a) personal development; b) health and well being; c) family and community; and d) education and employment.

### **Promotion, Publicity and Outreach**

36. A wide range of publicity, awareness-raising and promotion work is needed at local VEC level. The community education service should collaborate with the wider VEC in relation to community education promotional strategies. Outreach and promotion include:
  - Informing the public about the community education services available;
  - Recruiting new participants to community education programmes;
  - Identifying and overcoming barriers to participation with reference to specific target groups;
  - Building local partnerships: inter-agency contacts and cooperation are key features of outreach strategies to community education target groups;
  - Supporting local centres and groups with strong links to their local civil societies;
  - Using existing learners as ambassadors or champions to reach their peers;
  - Getting to know potential participants by engaging in neighbourhood work

It is acknowledged that outreach is essentially ‘process’ work and may be time-consuming without being able to demonstrate actual concrete outcomes: however the activities undertaken should be documented, evaluated and included in annual reports and qualitative reports

37. The community education service should be actively involved in the development of local awareness raising initiatives such as adult learners’ festivals and other promotional events that celebrate non-formal and informal learning and learner achievement. Promotional strategies need to be creative and sensitive to learners’ needs and perceptions. They should be evaluated for their effectiveness and should evolve with changing learner profiles.

## **Guidance**

38. The Adult Educational Guidance Service (AEGS) provides adult education information to the general public and personal, educational and vocational guidance to those in designated target groups including those attending or planning to attend community education programmes
39. Guidance should be a key aspect of community education programmes and where possible, should be available at all stages including pre-entry stage and pre exit on an integrated basis in collaboration with the community group organiser. It is important for learners to have access to information and guidance to help them make an informed decision about course choice, including certification, if required, which the AEGS may assist them to achieve. Ongoing guidance also supports the learner's motivation to continue with a programme, especially where previous educational experiences may have been negative. The role of local tutors in the provision of frontline guidance is an essential one and should be promoted
40. It is essential that a communications protocol is in place between the community education service and the AEGS. The CEF and AEGS Co-ordinator should put in place an annual plan for the provision of adult education guidance to adult learners engaging in the community education service and this should be communicated to the community education team with a particular focus on tutors. In-service training for community education tutors should include guidance awareness training in consultation with the AEGS. Information on adult education options and both one-to-one and group adult education guidance should be provided as appropriate. Particular consideration should be given to promoting progression options. Information on adult education, and both one-to-one and group guidance should be provided to learners as appropriate.

## **Progression**

41. Progression within and from the adult education service should be promoted and developed. It should be supported by the CEF with input from the AEGS. While community education learning programmes should focus on non accredited learning (see 34 above,) learners should be offered opportunities to move on to accredited provision within the VEC adult education service or elsewhere

## **Reporting Requirements**

42. The CEO should sign off on the annual community education statistical and expenditure returns which are required by the Department.