Community Education and the Labour Activation Challenge

A Literature Review on Community Education in a Context of Labour Market Activation, Employability and Active Citizenship in Ireland and the EU

Community Education Facilitators' Association 2014

FOREWORD

The Lisbon Strategy (2000) stated that 'education' was pivotal for the promotion of active citizenship and the promotion of employability within the European Union. The purpose of this literature review is to look at the policies, research and practice driving the development of community education in Ireland, Britain and Europe with a particular focus on the contribution community education is making, and can continue to make, towards the promotion of employability and active citizenship in Ireland. The review is being undertaken at a time when Further Education and Training services in Ireland are undergoing great change with the amalgamations of VECs into ETBs and the development of SOLAS and QQI. All stakeholders in Further Education and Training are anxious to be heard by those leading the change. For those involved in community education being heard is about ensuring that what is good about the current Further Education and Training system does not get lost in this change.

To this end, in 2011, CEFA published its position paper "*Community Education; Enhancing Learning, Fostering Empowerment and Contributing to Civic Society*" which outlines a clear vision for community education in Ireland. The Department of Education and Skills issued Community Education Operational Guidelines for providers in 2012 which reinforced community education's position in the education system in Ireland.

To build on this work CEFA commissioned Liam Mc Glynn (Institute of Technology, Blanchardstown) to conduct this literature review which has provided some very valuable insights into how community education is meeting the activation challenge in terms of promoting active citizenship and promoting employability. This insight is invaluable in ensuring that community education remains a vibrant part of the Irish education and training system, supports the development of a bottom-up approach and a society that can sustain a 'smart' economy.

CEFA believes that community education is capable of helping to make Ireland a better, stronger society capable of making the most of what it has. While those who work in community education can see examples of this happening around them, it is acknowledged in the literature review that there is a dearth of documented practice examples in Ireland, Britain and Europe. The literature also acknowledges that there is a growing need for appropriate validation systems for community education. CEFA could actively support such research and create appropriate feedback mechanisms that will allow for the validation of, and reporting on, improved employability skills and the wider benefits of learning for learners and society.

In his conclusion Liam McGlynn expresses his view that the community education sector can unleash the potential in society.

"if it retains its commitment to a core ethos which seeks deeper structural change to a more sustainable economy and society informed by the values of community solidarity, equality and justice. Such a vision if allowed to flourish may create a world of work, end labour market exclusion and empower citizens".

CEFA would like to thank Liam McGlynn for the energy, time and commitment given to writing this literature review. It will inform our work as Community Education Facilitators and help us to identify priorities for our new strategic plan from 2014. CEFA also thanks their colleagues Siobhán Lynch, Mary Flannery, Barbara Hammond and Dónal Walsh who supported Mr McGlynn's work. Finally CEFA would like to acknowledge the financial support for our association from the Department of Education and Skills.

Nuala O'Brien
Chairperson, CEFA

PREFACE

Policy documents for this literature review were sourced at EU level from: *europa.eu,* the official website of the European Union, including the European Commission, *Cedefop*, the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, at international level from: the *OECD*, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, at Irish level from: the relevant government departments, *Education and Skills*, *Social Protection*, and *Jobs Enterprise and Innovation* and *NESC*, the National Economic and Social Council and *NESF*, the National Economic and Social Forum.

Academic Journals consulted for this literature review included issues of *The Adult Learner* (Irish Journal of Adult and Community Education), *Studies in the Education of Adults* (UK) 2007-2012 (Journal of the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education), *Adult Education Quarterly* (Journal of the American Association of Adult and Continuing Education*, New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* (North America) and *Adult Education and Development,* a German publication focusing on adult and community education in a global south development co-operation context. The *Irish Journal of Community Development*, 2009-2012 and the *Community Development Journal* (UK) 2009-2013 were also consulted from a community education perspective.

Periodicals consulted for this literature review included *Explore,* a quarterly magazine from AONTAS, the National Adult Learning Organisation in Ireland and *Adults Learning,* a monthly periodical of the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education in the UK.

The publications and research pages of relevant organizational websites were also consulted for the research including CEFA (Community Education Facilitators Association), AONTAS, NIACE(UK), and Cedefop (EU).

The most relevant policy, research and practice-based literature was assembled for the purposes of the literature review, with regard to the research question, *in what ways does community education meet the labour market activation and employability challenge of the current unemployment crisis in Ireland?* In presenting this literature, a choice had to be made between a thematic approach and a framework approach. In the former, each key theme would be taken and all relevant literature (policy, research, academic, practice) for that theme would be assembled and presented e.g. the relevant literature for the theme of *recognition of non-formal and informal learning*. In the end it was decided to use the latter, the framework approach, drawing from the three main sources; policy, research and practice. At the same time, there is an attempt to create threads linking the key themes across the three strands framework: *labour activation, employability, active citizenship, recognition of non-formal and informal learning* and *wider benefits of lifelong learning*.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the aftermath of the global economic crisis of 2008 and the subsequent recession in Ireland and indeed across Europe, public discourse in politics, society, academia and media has focused on explaining the crisis as well as looking for solutions to the crisis. In the context of the Irish recession now in its fifth year, with unemployment at 13.6% or 435,357 (Central Statistics Office, 2013) of which long term unemployment is alarmingly high at 8.4% or 180,500 (Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed, 2013), there is understandable urgency across all sectors to find ways out of the crisis.

It is against this backdrop of Ireland's fall from the dizzying heights of the celtic tiger years to the depths of the celtic crash, that all sectors of the state are being mobilized 'to mending the pieces of a fractured society, (and to fix) a broken economy' (Department of the Taoiseach, 2011). The further education and training sector is at the forefront of efforts to support individuals and communities devastated by the loss of jobs, unemployment, and fear for the future.

The impact of Ireland's bailout and adjustment programme with the troika (IMF, ECB and EU) is widely documented elsewhere in the print media. Public spending on areas such as health and education have not been spared the cutbacks in public expenditure, however there is a broad commitment to protect programmes which work with unemployed people. Whilst there has been a general commitment by government to protect the most vulnerable in society, at the same time, there is evidence that some programmes have been disproportionately affected by cutbacks (Harvey, 2013, 2012, NESC, 2013).

Further education and training is one of the options to which people turn following life altering events such as job loss. It has also been the port of call for many who are starting out on job search. In the context of achieving savings in the state's public finances, the Irish further education and training sector is currently undergoing a major reconfiguration. As community education is located within the further education and training sector these changes are likely to have some bearing on the work. That said, community education has stayed close to the grassroots communities irrespective of the institutional configuration under which it receives its funding. What is important is that its role be recognised, its contribution valued and maintained in the midst of the crisis. If the government are seeking solutions to the crisis, they might consider the approach and positive outcomes happening in community education involving community education facilitators, tutors, facilitators, participant learners, volunteers, community workers and activists.

This literature review presents evidence of the contribution community education is making and can continue to make toward employability, labour market activation and active citizenship in Ireland. The literature is examined here under three headings; policy, research and practice, reflecting the range and type of literature available. The review covers Irish, British and European policy, research, reports and academic studies across all three headings. Policy is not defined in a vacuum and builds on practice and research. It is therefore important to provide an overview of the relevant public policy positions articulated by the Irish government and the EU at this time. Despite its relatively lowly status within the education landscape, further education and training and community education in particular features widely in academic research journals and periodicals in the US, EU, Britain and Ireland. The evidence of 'really useful knowledge' (Thompson, 1996) drawn from practice which supports individuals and communities for sustainable livelihoods attests to the value of community education.

It must be said at the outset, that adult and community educators across the sector from academics to practitioners have railed against a narrow focus on adult and community education which sees its role as meeting the needs of the economy and employers or at the service of the state in providing skills training. Such a narrow focus is rightly rejected by the sector. Several commentators in the UK and Ireland have cautioned against such a narrow instrumental view of adult, community and further education in general (Crowther, 2013; Finnegan, 2008; Connolly, 2007; Brady, 2006; Thompson, 1996). Those working in the sector assert the social purpose origins and meaning of adult and community education which is about empowerment of marginalized individuals and communities for collective social and economic transformation. It is political and asserts democratic participation and focuses on social justice outcomes. Commenting on Scottish government policy on further education for post16 year olds, Crowther exemplifies this broader vision of education:

> What is needed is a vision of education which makes a vital contribution to a humane, democratic and socially just society as well as a thriving and sustainable economic life.
> (Crowther, 2011, p. 15)

Therefore a literature review exploring the connection between community education and employability and the labour market agenda may appear at odds with the goals of adult and community education. It may appear to implicitly accept an economic agenda. However, what is presented here demonstrates that community education is neither rejectionist or disengaged from economic reality, but rather it is fully engaged and raises a critical red flag to narrow policy making which would discard the social purpose dimensions of community education.

The literature considered here under policy, research and practice headings reveals the role and space occupied by community education. It points to the contribution it makes in empowering people to grow in confidence in their own employability and engage with the labour market whilst contributing to politicized and collective active citizenship. The research question which this literature review will seek to address is:

In what ways does community education meet the labour activation and employability challenge of the current unemployment crisis in Ireland?

The reader may find it useful to treat this literature review as a repository where they can dip in and out at different sections or places without the need to read the entire document.

2. POLICY

Introduction

In general terms, lifelong learning, as a concept and set of actions received an important boost through the focus placed on it by the European Union institutions. In the first part, we consider these policies. From the *Lisbon Strategy 2000* to *Europe 2020*, the EU has produced a number of significant policy platforms in the area of lifelong learning, adult education, vocational education and training, and recognition of informal and non-formal learning, to name a few. In this section, these policies will be considered with a view to locating the space which community education occupies in European policy.

The second part will consider the development of lifelong learning policy in Ireland against the backdrop of the current economic, unemployment and jobs crisis. Education and training is one of the sectors tasked with addressing the crisis. The dimensions of the crisis itself and the key labour activation and jobs policies pursued by government necessarily impact on how programmes such as community education working with those who are unemployed and vulnerable groups respond to the current challenge. These policies: labour activation, action plan for jobs, lifelong learning and active citizenship will be considered in this part.

Europe: Growth, Jobs and Social Cohesion

The place of lifelong learning is well secured in European Union policy making. Whilst there is debate about the orientation of the policy in terms of the balance between an economic purpose orientation and a social purpose orientation, it is clear that lifelong learning is gaining greater recognition as a crucial concept and set of actions with potential to bring about a sustainable economy and cohesive society across Europe. There is a slightly different emphasis between EU and Irish understandings of lifelong learning. In the EU context lifelong learning encompasses all learning, formal, non-formal and informal from the cradle to the grave, whereas the Irish understanding tends to focus on adult learning.

Lisbon Strategy 2000

The goal of the Lisbon Strategy agreed in 2000 was 'to make the EU the most competitive and dynamic knowledge based economy in the world capable of sustaining more and better jobs and with greater social cohesion' (Council of the European Union, 2000). The strategy was revised in 2005 with a greater focus on growth and jobs (Council of the European Union, 2005). Framed at a time of prosperity with falling unemployment across the EU, the Lisbon Strategy set out to meet the challenges of globalisation, an explosion of information and communication technologies, and the continuing challenges of racism, xenophobia and gender inequality (Europa, 2013a). Yet, when reviewed in 2005, there was still a problem of long term

unemployment across the EU and the EU Commission assessed that the strategy was not delivering on its promise. One aspect of the revised strategy was to 'invest more in human capital by improving education and skills', and an intention to adopt 'a community(EU) lifelong learning programme' committing member states to 'submit national strategies in this area in 2006' (Europa, 2013b).

Europe 2020

Europe 2020 (European Commission, 2010) setting out a strategy for 'smart, sustainable and inclusive growth' commenced in 2010 against the backdrop of the collapse of many of the economies of European member states, mass unemployment and negative growth across the EU. From an education and training perspective, the strategy includes three initiatives of relevance; 'youth on the move' education focusing on youth preparedness for the labour market, 'an agenda for new skills and jobs' to empower people to develop skills throughout the lifecycle, and 'European platform against poverty' (EC, 2010, pp. 3-4). Identifying targets for reductions in early school leaving and increasing tertiary participation, Europe 2020 makes generalised headline statements on lifelong learning, for example, '80 million people have low or basic skills, but lifelong learning benefits mostly the more educated' (EC, 2010, p. 16). An increasing demand for high skills will replace the demand for low skills; therefore people in the EU will need to upskill and reskill for a probable longer working life.

ET 2020

Whilst Europe 2020 sets the overall agenda, there is greater detail relevant to community education within the *ET 2020 Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training* (Council of the European Union, 2009).The aims of this policy are to promote; lifelong learning and mobility, quality, efficiency, equity, social cohesion, active citizenship and entrepreneurship in education and training. There is an assumed compatibility between these aspects, something critical commentators would question. However, the focus on lifelong learning is welcome and for community educators, this policy is consistent with much of the work happening in this field. The most relevant target for lifelong learning stated is that 'by 2020 an average of at least 15% of adults (age group 25-64) should participate in lifelong learning' (Council, 2009, p. 7). The figure for the EU 27 member states in 2011 was 8.9%, with Ireland's rate at 7.1% (Eurostat, 2011). The concepts of human capital and social capital (described in academic terms by Bourdieu, 1996 and Putnam, 2000), employability, and active citizenship feature widely in the document.

Crucially, for community educators, ET 2020 states that the further development of education and training systems across the EU should ensure 'sustainable economic prosperity and

employability, whilst promoting democratic values, social cohesion, active citizenship and intercultural dialogue' (p. 3). Notice how these are to happen in tandem, an indication that the EU places significant importance on the social Europe as much as the economic Europe. Furthermore, lifelong learning is viewed as a 'fundamental principle' and 'covers learning in all contexts – formal, non-formal and informal' (Council, 2009, p. 3). In the otherwise crowded space of formal accredited learning in schools, colleges and institutions, community education provides that haven of non-formal and informal learning in a community-based context. These spaces are viewed as more accessible for disadvantaged individuals and communities. ET 2020 reinforces the value of such education by calling for 'greater openness towards non-formal and informal learning' (p. 3). There is a significant strand of research on the contribution of non-formal and informal education which has been undertaken by Cedefop in the main. These studies are discussed in the research section of this review. Practice examples of non-formal and informal learning are considered from the Irish context in that section.

One of the strategic objectives of ET 2020 is to promote equity, social cohesion and active citizenship.

> '(to) enable all citizens irrespective of their personal, social or economic circumstances, to acquire, update and develop over a lifetime both job-specific skills and the key competences needed for their employability and to foster further learning, active citizenship and intercultural dialogue'
>
> (Council of the European Union, 2009, p. 4)

Community education in Ireland has traditionally occupied this space in providing a first step or re-entry into education for individuals and groups affected by multiple disadvantages. The courses are based on the needs expressed by the group or community and are provided using a 'personalised learning' approach (p. 4). In keeping with a further objective of ET 2020, community education is both 'innovative' and 'entrepreneurial' (p. 4). Many individuals and community groups who hitherto lacked confidence or self-esteem have developed teamwork and organisational skills, improved literacy and computer skills to name a few (AONTAS, 2013) These all contribute to employability and increased social capital and networking in the community. Social capital translates to economic capital, thus delivering an economic dividend from a social activity. We will consider the measurement of the social benefits of lifelong learning in the research section.

European policy on lifelong Learning

Adult learning defined as learning which takes place following completion of initial education received a fresh impetus when the European Union agreed the *council resolution on a renewed European agenda for adult learning* (Council of the European Union, 2011). This policy is

entirely consistent with Europe 2020 and ET 2020, therefore it is not intended to repeat this content here. Suffice it to say that the renewed agenda seeks to 'promote personal and professional development, empowerment, adaptability, employability and active participation in society' (2011, p. 3). It is worth noting that the council communiqué sounds a word of concern at the gap between the rate of adult learning participation 8.9% in 2011 to the target of 15% in 2020. As a starting point toward further education and vocational training for many adults, community education approaches will contribute to meeting this target.

European policy on non-formal and informal learning

At a time when the currency of educational credentials is very much prized and to a large extent determines future employment, how is non-accredited informal and non-formal learning to be valued? The recognition of informal and non-formal learning is something which the European Union takes seriously. In 2012, the Council of the European Union adopted a '*council recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning*' (Council, 2012). Again, this is part of the Europe wide co-operation on education and training under ET2020. As the returns[1] for community education in Ireland make clear, 5% of the 55,000 participants gain a full accredited award, therefore the majority of programmes are non-accredited informal and non-formal courses.

> 'knowledge, skills and competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning can play an important role in enhancing employability and mobility as well as increasing motivation for lifelong learning, particularly in the case of the socio-economically disadvantaged or the low qualified'.
>
> (Council of the European Union, 2012, p. 1)

The EU recommendation defines formal learning as that which 'takes place in an organised and structured environment', leading to 'the award of a qualification' (Council, 2012, p. 5). Non-formal learning is defined as taking place 'through planned activities (in terms of learning objectives and learning time)', involving a student teacher support, for example, 'in-company training' such as ICT (p. 5). Informal learning refers to 'learning resulting from daily activities related to work, family or leisure and is not organised or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support' (p. 5). Examples of the latter offered include. 'skills acquired through volunteering, cultural activities, sports, youth work' (p. 5) or home management.

Backing up the recommendation, '*common European principles for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning*' had been agreed already among member states (Council, 2004). Six principles were identified; the purpose of validation, individual entitlement,

[1] Data obtained on request from the Department of Education & Skills (unpublished) and provided to the Community Education Facilitators' Association based on the returns provided by CEFs in Ireland (CEFA, July, 2013)

responsibilities of institutions and stakeholders, confidence and trust, impartiality, and credibility and legitimacy. These common principles have provided a framework for individual countries in the EU to organise their recognition systems. The latest recommendations expands on these common principles and are listed below (Council, 2012, p. 3):

a. Validation arrangements need to be linked to national qualifications frameworks.
b. Information and guidance are available to individuals and organisations.
c. Disadvantaged groups are likely to benefit from non-formal and informal validation.
d. Individuals who are unemployed have opportunity to have a 'skills audit'.
e. Validation is supported by guidance and counselling.
f. Transparent quality assurance applies to assessment methodologies.
g. Provision for the development of the professional competence of staff.
h. Qualifications comply with agreed standards (similar to formal education programmes).

Validation systems for non-formal and informal learning must include the following elements; (i) identification of learning outcomes, (ii) documentation of learning outcomes, (iii) assessment of learning outcomes, and (iv) certification of the results of assessment in the form of a qualification and/or credits. Research and practice aspects of non-formal and informal learning will be considered in those sections later in this review.

European policy and active citizenship

Active citizenship is closely associated with volunteering in the Irish experience. This is also recognised at EU level and indeed it has been through voluntary commitment that many disadvantaged communities in Ireland have accessed EU funding for development projects. These projects in turn have provided much needed employment.

Education and active citizenship in the European Union (European Commission, 1998) outlined a 'broader idea of citizenship' (p. 3) which recognised its close alignment with civic, social and political engagement as well as social inclusion and cultural identity and diversity. Learning for active citizenship (1998, p. 14) goes beyond civil, social and political education at the formal level to include the non-formal. Lifelong learning is envisaged as the vehicle which marries formal and non-formal education 'for extending the scope of learning for active citizenship to all groups in the community' (p. 15).

The Lisbon Strategy (Council of the European Union, 2000) which committed the EU to a future knowledge-based economy, envisaged a key role for lifelong learning in achieving this goal. In subsequent policy the role of active citizenship within lifelong learning allied with employability features strongly:

> two equally important aims for lifelong learning: promoting active citizenship and promoting employability. Active citizenship focuses on whether and how people participate in all spheres of social and economic life, the chances and risks they face in

> trying to do so, and the extent to which they therefore feel that they belong to and have a fair say in the society in which they live.
>
> (European Commission, 2000, p. 5)

Irish policy on active citizenship is considered below and research and practice aspects are considered in those sections.

Ireland: Unemployment, Activation and Education

In Ireland, two key policy drivers, one on the welfare to work side and one on the job creation side of public policy have a significant influence in shaping the response to unemployment and the jobs crisis across all areas including education. *Pathways to Work* (Department of Social Protection, 2012) sets out government policy on labour market activation. The focus here is on returning unemployed people to the workforce as soon as possible. The *Action Plan for Jobs* (Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, 2012) details specific actions to meet the government's target of '100,000 more people in work by 2016' (p. 7). The requirement that 40% of new jobs be filled by unemployed people on the live register is evidence of a level of joined up thinking between both policies and their respective departments. The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs is also a key policy shaper in this co-ordinated response to unemployment and the jobs crisis. These policies are outlined below.

Pathways to Work 2012

Pathways to Work (DSP, 2012) commits the employment services of the state to greater 'engagement with and support to the unemployed' (p. 5). Making reference to hitherto 'passive' engagement between state employment services and people on the live register, resulting in long-term unemployment and deskilling (p. 10), this new strategy is more active. Employment services are responsible to provide supports to the unemployed person and in return the unemployed person is responsible for engaging with the supports on offer. There is a particular focus on the long term unemployed and supporting their return to the labour market through a job, education or training. Three targets are set out to 2015; 75,000 of the currently 180,000 long term unemployed to be employed again by 2015, the average time on the live register to reduce from 21 to 14 months, and, by 2015, 40% of jobs filled through the state employment services to be filled by people on the live register (pp. 8-9).

The key aspect of *Pathways to Work* policy from an education and training perspective is in relation to the second strand 'greater targeting of activation places and opportunities' (p. 14). 75,000 FÁS/SOLAS training places and 180,000 further education places (delivered by VECs / ETBs) are provided for in 2012 (p. 16). The government is 'committed to maintaining the

resourcing of these programmes' (p. 16) despite the need to reduce overall public spending. However, the objective for this spending is clearly spelt out:

> 'we will target these resources to maximise the efficiency and effectiveness of the programmes with a view to delivering a greater focus on keeping the unemployed close to the labour market. We are reviewing training and further education options so that employment prospects for participants are improved'.
>
> (DSP, 2012, p. 16)

An integrated approach underpins the call for 'structured consultation' between the reconfigured National Employment and Entitlement Service within the Department of Social Protection and SOLAS (the new training authority to replace FÁS) and the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs in relation to 'the development and delivery of education and training programmes to meet the needs of those on the Live Register and national skills needs' (DSP, 2012, p. 21). More specifically, and directly relevant for further education and community education is the plan to implement protocols between NEES, SOLAS and the VECs (now Education and Training Boards), to ensure unemployed people can be referred to 'suitable education and training opportunities' (p. 21).

As indicated above, reconfiguration of employment services features in *Pathways to Work*. Based on an OECD recommendation in its 2009 review of activation policies in Ireland (Grubb, Singh & Tergeist, 2009, p. 137) which highlighted a perceived weakness in the separation of activation and welfare functions between two to three departments, FÁS employment services have now been integrated within the NEES in the Department of Social Protection. The changes are also welcomed by the National Economic and Social Council (NESC, 2011, p. 4).

In summary, *Pathways to Work* is a succinct and clear statement of strategy to address unemployment by moving from a passive approach to an activation approach. It sets clear targets and broad approaches to achieving these targets.

Action Plan for Jobs 2013

The National Action Plan for Jobs was first published in 2012 (DJEI, 2012) and will be published annually in the lifetime of the current government. It is a much more expansive document than Pathways to Work. For example, a detailed table for the 2013 action plan sets out 333 separate actions, a timeline for each action and a named body responsible for its delivery. However, the document does not give any breakdown of the 100,000 jobs to be created, and how many jobs are expected to be created for each action. Furthermore, there is no apparent monitoring system to either count the jobs or measure progress toward the target, apart from high level quarterly meetings of the relevant ministers. That said, the plan does include some

actions which are relevant to the FE sector and fit neatly with the function areas of community education.

Before focusing on these, the plan for 2013 (DJEI, 2013), as was the case in 2012, seeks to create conditions for the generation of jobs through seven themes; competitiveness, indigenous business, entrepreneurship, community and local level employment, attracting foreign direct investment and specific sectors (p. 9). The plan also outlines seven, what are termed 'disruptive' or 'cross cutting reforms', namely; data analysis, ICT skills, business licence simplification, trading on-line, Jobs plus incentive to employers to recruit a long-term unemployed person, energy efficiency and life sciences / health innovation.

Returning to community education's role within this plan, the most relevant section 'supporting employment at community and local level' (DJEI, 2013, pp. 102-107) identifies the establishment of 'socio-economic committees', the 'local and community development programme', 'rural development programme', 'youth unemployment' and 'volunteering' (p. 103) as fields of employment creation. In particular, youth services are identified as spaces providing young people with 'opportunities for experiential learning', 'skills building' and 'competence development' (p. 103) all part of the repertoire of community educators. Community Education Facilitators have already built strong links with the Local and Community Development Programme and bring education expertise to support young people and adults along the education pathway in these areas of disadvantage. Specifically, the *2013 Action Plan for Jobs* describes action 227, that 'through the LCDP, we will continue to work towards increasing access to formal and informal educational, recreational and cultural activities and resources' (p. 105). The community education sections of the VECs have a record in delivering such actions and will continue to do so under the new Education and Training Boards.

Expert Group on Future Skills Needs

The role of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs is to advise government on future skills needs and labour market trends in the economy. Based on this, the group also advises government on 'priority education and training requirements' (EGFSN, 2012a, p. 5).

Replacement jobs in manufacturing are up to 5,000 annually and the future skills are in the areas of medical devices, bio-pharma, food and beverages, ICT hardware, engineering and consumer products sector. Engineering skills needs are in areas such as validation, polymer, quality, automation and supply chain engineering (p. 6). A more useful analysis provided by EGFSN is their annual vacancy overview. The data is drawn from adverts in the Jobs Ireland (FÁS) and irishjobs.ie websites. Most of the vacancies were not new jobs but due to turnover and replacement. The sectors featuring most frequently were industry, IT and financial services, and

demand for language proficiency, German and French (p. 7). The national skills database and the national skills bulletin also provide useful data on trends in skills needs. There are skills shortages in 'sales and related occupations, including marketing (especially digital marketing) and customer services roles, IT professionals, science and engineering professionals, business professionals, administrative occupations, IT associate professionals, and personal care occupations' (p. 9). The relevance of community education as the first step in supporting participants to develop generic employability skills which may lead to future work will be considered in the research and practice sections of this review. The expert group also provides a profile of the characteristics associated with being at high risk of unemployment, 'male, non-Irish national, younger than 25, holding at or below lower secondary level qualification, and having formerly worked in construction' (p. 9).

EGFSN also monitor the trends in education and training in Ireland to report on the skills supply side. The report *Trends in Education and Training Outputs 2012* (EGFSN, 2012b) taken together with the Central Statistics Office special report on Lifelong Learning for 2008 (CSO, 2010), provides a comprehensive picture of the participation rate of adults in further education and lifelong learning.

Regarding Further Education, the EGFSN reports that in 2011 the number of FETAC award holders reached 181,000, with 334,000 awards made at all levels. The majority of awards were for level 5 (178,842), level 3 (70,557) and level 4 (46073) respectively (FETAC cited in EGFSN, 2012b, p. 52). This section provides a detailed breakdown for age, gender and field of learning. The key fields of learning were education, health and welfare (e.g. childcare, healthcare support), business and administration (eg. Business studies, secretarial studies) and core skills, languages and general studies (p. 57). Almost half '46% of all FETAC awards were made to learners at VEC/school centres' (p. 56).

Participation rates in community education

According to statistics provided by the Department of Education and Skills and compiled from returns submitted by Community Education Facilitators (CEFA, 2013), 55,415 mainly adults participated in community education in 2012 (75% Women, 25% Men). Whilst the majority of community education was non-accredited, non-formal and informal, approximately 2,600 FETAC awards were achieved in the year. 11,529 (20%) of participants declared as unemployed, and a further 27,151 declared as 'not in the labour market'. The number of participants who were unemployed increased from 11% in 2009 to 20% in 2012.

The EGFSN report includes a chapter on lifelong learning participation (2012b, pp. 116-126) based on the quarterly national household survey for the fourth quarter 2011. The key findings

are that 4.4% or 107,000 of the adult population aged 25 years or older participated in formal lifelong learning in the previous four weeks (p. 117). What is significant is the increase by one third on the same figure for the fourth quarter in 2006. The economic status of the lifelong learning population is also revealing; 48,000 economically inactive, 37,000 in full time employment, 13,000 in part-time employment and significantly 9,300 or 9% unemployed (p. 122). However this data only reflects participation in formal learning.

The CSO special survey on lifelong learning undertaken in 2008 (CSO, 2010) includes data on participation for non-formal and informal learning as well as formal learning. Whereas EGFSN report that 4.4% of the adult population participated in formal lifelong learning, the CSO reports a much higher rate of 25% when non-formal and informal learning is included in the data. The latter includes in-service training in the workplace which is likely to increase the rate. The CSO report on lifelong learning in which people participated the previous year; 5% formal, 20% non-formal, 23% formal and/or non-formal and 55% informal (CSO, 2010, p. 1). Participation in lifelong learning is highest for the employed (31%) followed by the unemployed (25%). Crucially, the higher the level of educational attainment the higher the participation rates in informal education.

The significance of these statistics is that they demonstrate that community education is particularly adept at engaging unemployed people and those outside the labour market in non-accredited, non-formal and informal education.

Irish policy on lifelong learning

Building on the emergence of community education as a distinct sector within Irish education since the late 19th century, the White Paper on Adult Education, *Learning for Life* (Department of Education and Science, 2000) was the first official policy document which recognized community education within the Irish education system. The White Paper presents two definitions of community education (DES, 2000, p. 110). Community education is defined in two ways in the white paper, firstly, as 'an extension of the service provided by second and third-level education institutions into the wider community' (p. 110), and secondly, as 'a process of communal education towards empowerment, both at an individual and collective level' (p. 110). It is both in and of the community and has a 'collective social purpose and inherently political agenda – to promote critical reflection, challenge existing structures, and promote empowerment' (p. 113). Whilst some aspects of the policy outlined in the white paper were delivered, namely the appointment of community education facilitators, allocation of a dedicated fund, other aspects remain to be delivered, such as governance and committee arrangements as well as a technical unit.

Irish policy on community education

In 2012 the Department of Education and Skills issued *Community Education Programme: Operational Guidelines for Providers* (DES, 2012) to the Vocational Education Committees. The guidelines set out the definition of community education located 'outside the formal sector', 'fostering empowerment' and 'contributing to civic society' (p. 3). The programme is explicitly targeted at local groups, both area-based and issue-based with a 'particular emphasis on reducing educational and social disadvantage' (p. 4). Adults with low or no formal educational qualifications, the unemployed, one parent families, Travellers, older people and homeless people and many other groups are the focus of the community education programme. The programme provides them with a step 'to more active community involvement or certified learning' (p. 4). 'Intensive outreach work is a key method' employed in the programme. The guidelines have regard to the current high levels of unemployment, and target particularly 'the low skilled, the long term unemployed, under 35s and those formerly employed in construction, retail and manufacturing' (p. 5). These sectors have experienced significant job losses since 2008.

The remaining aspects of the guidelines lay down operational protocols for management, financial management, staffing and reporting, and inter-agency partnership. As is the pattern with much public service reform informed by having to do 'more with less', the department guidelines call for 'a cohesive integrated service approach' to work strategically and 'avoid duplication' (p. 7). There is however little evidence of duplication heretofore, and whilst integration has merits, the danger with integrated service approaches is that the distinctiveness of programmes can be lost, so literacy, community education and guidance can loose visibility. This danger is mitigated however by safeguarding community education funding from transfer to other programmes within the VEC. Guideline 14 (p. 5) states 'any transfer of community education funding to any other programme must have prior written approval of the Department'.

Community Education Facilitators' Association: position paper

The Community Education Facilitators' Association produced their position paper *Community Education: Enhancing Learning, Fostering Empowerment and Contributing to Civic Society* in November 2011 (CEFA, 2011). The paper sets out a collective view on the core principles and ethos of community education and a shared focus on the future direction of the work in Ireland. The paper is inspired by the 'transformation in individuals and communities' which community education facilitators have experienced in their work over the past decade. The paper outlines a clear vision of community education; the philosophy and ethos, the objectives, the methodology of the work, the role of the facilitator and tutor, the pedagogical approach, and the target groups.

The unique feature of this way of working is the possibility of engaging people at four levels in the one course, personal development, community development, social analysis and political participation (p. 4). An example is illustrative. An art course will contribute to personal development, enabling expression, a way of relaxing, and develop creative skills. The images painted or etched may raise themes in the community enabling dialogue about life in the community. These can become the spark for deeper analysis of issues in the locality and contribute to confidence in taking action at a political level.

CEFA identify four key issues arising for community education in Ireland (i) the need to value and reassert social purpose as well as economic or labour market purpose in line with EU policy, (ii) the need to improve knowledge, research capacity and measurement systems to further capture the value of community education, (iii) to improve the targeting of community education for particular marginalized groups, and (iv) to strengthen partnership with local and community development and ensure its support at inter-departmental level also (CEFA, 2011, pp. 9-13).

The paper concludes with seven specific proposals on the path forward, only one of which has been delivered namely, the Department of Education operational guidelines for community education. The remaining proposals acknowledge resource constraints at this time, nevertheless, a ring-fenced budget and a dedicated community educational technical unit is called for as well as a working group tasked with agreeing indicators for measuring outcomes and tracking progression. Given that other sectors have dedicated inspectorates and curriculum development units, the scale of numbers now participating in adult and community education merit similar supports at Department of Education & Skills level.

Irish policy on active citizenship

Whereas references to the 'citizen' are confined to status and legal entitlement within the Irish constitution, a broader understanding of 'active citizenship' appears in official policy starting with the government's White Paper on Supporting Voluntary Activity (Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, 2000).

> Active citizenship refers to the active role of people, communities and voluntary organisations in decision-making which directly affects them. This extends the concept of formal citizenship and democratic society from one of basic civil, political and social and economic rights to one of direct democratic participation and responsibility.
>
> (DSCFA, 2000, p. 14)

The white paper also states that active citizenship is about 'strengthening community and voluntary organisations' and overcomes alienation felt by many groups (such as the long-term unemployed) as a result of 'centralisation of both economic and political decision-making' (p. 65). The white paper outlines a dynamic and powerful understanding of active citizenship, in that 'citizenship is a political activity which gives citizens the opportunity to shape the society in which they live' (p. 65).

In 2006, the government established the *Taskforce on Active Citizenship* to examine trends in active citizenship understood as civic engagement and to propose actions to promote it. The taskforce report (Secretariat of the Taskforce on Active Citizenship, 2007) outlines a vision for active citizenship in Ireland and its role in creating 'a just, open and inclusive society' (p. 1). The vision draws on a civic republican understanding of citizenship:

> A 'civic republican' perspective emphasises the individual's sense of social concern as a member of a political community. We believe that the age-old principles of democracy should form the bedrock values guiding us towards the future: liberty, equality and solidarity.
>
> (STAC, 2007, p. 1)

Active citizenship is also about engagement and participation. The profile of the active citizen conveyed by the taskforce is one where all citizens are supported and encouraged to volunteer their time in local community and voluntary activities and groups (p. 2). It also involves respecting ethnic and cultural diversity and welcoming new people who come to live in Ireland (p. 2).

The taskforce's nationwide consultation process between July and October 2006 along with an ESRI study found that trends in civic participation between 2002 and 2006 actually increased in Ireland unlike Putnam's reported declining trends over a longer timeframe in the US (Putnam, 2000). However, the taskforce found there were some groups who recorded lower levels of participation than others 'those over 65, those not in the labour force or not in study (especially homemakers), those on low income, persons living in urban areas, those who left school early and newcomers' (STAC, 2007, p. 8).

The taskforce later produced a progress report and future plans (Active Citizenship Office, 2008). However, the work of the taskforce was 'effectively shelved' at the start of the economic crisis in 2008 (The Wheel, 2013).

Education for active citizenship

The taskforce envisage a crucial role for education for citizenship and this is not confined to schools and colleges. The role of adult and community education is also important.

> Education and learning in the community has a key role…
>
> (STAC, 2007, p. 10)

The taskforce called for 'expansion of education for citizenship' in school, youth and adult education sectors (p. 21). The taskforce specifically recommends:

> The inclusion of workshops on active citizenship/voter education as a constituent element of adult / community education programmes.
>
> (STAC, 2007, p. 21)

Regrettably, the focus on active citizenship since the disbandment of the taskforce appears diminished. At a practical level the Department for the Environment, Community and Local Government have responsibility for part-funding with the local authorities, the national volunteer agency, Volunteer Ireland and a regional network of 23 volunteer centres (DECLG, 2012). In the research section of this review, Gaynor (2011) is critical of the depoliticised conception of citizenship in Ireland which confines it to voluntary activity. That said, volunteering provides an opportunity for people to gain valuable experience in planning, organising, teamwork, collaboration and event management among others. These are skills which are also directly relevant to the labour market. It could be argued that active citizenship contributes not only to social and civic development but also personal development and employability gains.

Infrastructural change in further education and training

In 2013, the government has reconfigured the infrastructure supporting further education and training. FÁS, the state training and employment agency, is being disbanded. Its job placement services have been moved the Department of Social Protection as stated earlier. Its training function will be moved to 16 Education and Training Boards (formerly 33 VECs) in 2014. SOLAS a new Further Education and Training Authority will be established to co-ordinate and fund the wide range of training and further education in Ireland with the Education and Training Boards being responsible for delivery of the programmes in local areas. These changes arise from a reconfiguration mooted by the OECD (Grubb, Singh & Tergeist, 2009, p. 137) and other commentators for the purpose of enabling a more co-ordinated approach.

The Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed

The Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed (INOU) has a vital role in informing policymakers about the impact of budgetary, welfare and employment policies on the unemployed. The INOU marked their twenty-fifth anniversary in 2012 in the midst of yet another unemployment crisis. The hope back in 1987 was that the INOU 'wouldn't have a 25th anniversary of the organisation' (INOU, 2012, p. 31).

The twin objectives of the INOU namely 'decent jobs for all' and 'proper living standards for jobseekers' (p. 7) were recalled at the twenty fifth anniversary conference. The conference report sets out the role proposed for education and training in tackling the unemployment crisis. The conference called for 'quality training to be at the heart of every labour market initiative' (p. 3). This is relevant in the roll out of Intreo offices where unemployed people may be assisted in finding jobs and the establishment of the new Education and Training Boards.

> Prioritise training with strong links to the labour market as this tends to enhance employment prospects. However, for some participants this may not be an accessible option so training should be provided based on the person's needs.
>
> (INOU, 2012, p. 4)

Putting people on courses which are not appropriate to their needs is counterproductive. The conference heard that quality adult education should include a good matching of courses to the needs of individual learners and provide 'good programme supports', as well as 'good quality tutors' and 'flexibility to take into account the life circumstances of the adult participants' (p. 4). Finally, it should pave the way for progression to a job or further education and training.

Considering that 80% of those who are unemployed are without a qualification (p. 4), the implicit message community educators can take from this conference report is that community education can provide a vital link for people on the pathway to future work.

Conclusion

What is clear from this review of EU and Irish policy on the role of lifelong learning in relation to labour activation, employability and active citizenship is the status which non-formal and informal learning occupies in EU policy. It clearly has a key role in the future development of Europe both in economic and social terms. Ireland is some way off the target participation rates set out by the EU for the adult population. The development of the new Europe is not solely the business of accredited formal education but also requires non-formal and informal learning. Clearly, this orientation in EU policy should have a positive impact on Irish policymaking in lifelong learning and further education and training in general. Labour activation policies which are integrated and focused on the best interests of people who are unemployed depend on a co-ordinated approach involving a number of partners including the further education and training system of which community education is a part.

3. RESEARCH

Introduction

In this section, research on the most relevant aspects of community education and its impact on employability, labour market activation and active citizenship will be considered at European, UK and Irish levels. There are a number of strands in the literature which have a bearing on the question posed at the outset of this literature review, *in what ways does community education meet the labour activation and employability challenge of the current unemployment crisis in Ireland?* These include the wider benefits of lifelong learning, recognition of non-formal and informal learning, employability outcomes of lifelong learning, and active citizenship. The research and academic studies assembled in this part are drawn from Europe, UK and Ireland. The purpose here is to identify those studies which point to the contribution which community education as non-formal and informal learning does make to enhancing learners' employability and labour market readiness as well as citizenship.

The majority of academic writing in adult and community education in Britain and Ireland rightly challenges a narrow 'skills for the economy' paradigm in education policy and practice which sidelines the social purpose of education. This writing draws on the critical tradition in adult and community education. It is beyond the scope of this literature review to consider this writing here. However, it is worth noting that a narrow focus on the economy as the determinant in education policy to the exclusion of social cohesion will be counterproductive. As the expression goes, 'we are more than an economy, we are a society'.

Europe

Cedefop: Researching the wider benefits of lifelong learning

The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) is an agency of the European Commission which provides information, analysis and research on education and training systems across EU member states. Though the focus may be on vocational education and training, the work of Cedefop informs further education and training and is relevant for our purposes in community education. In recent years, Cedefop have pursued a useful theme in researching the social and non-market benefits of vocational education and training. This review considers the conclusions of two of their studies in this area.

Cedefop's 2013 publication *Benefits of vocational education and training in Europe* provides a summary of Cedefop' research into the market and non-market benefits of VET since it commenced its enquiry in 2008. The report recognises the comparative lack of research into the non-market or social benefits of education compared to the market or economic benefits.

The Cedefop study argues that there has been too much focus on the potential of education and training to develop human capital to the exclusion of social, cultural and identity capital. These forms of capital make an important contribution to the economy and society also. However, it is solely human capital defined as the 'stock of knowledge, skills and competence' acquired by individuals which has been fully recognised in measurement terms. Human capital in market terms is measured in 'higher wages' and 'improved job and career prospects' (p. 20). In other words, only the economic or market benefits in terms of human capital are worthy as outcomes of an education process. This misses the important contribution which social capital, defined as social networks between groups of people, cultural capital, defined as educational, linguistic and functional competence in human groups can make to the economy. These have tended to be overlooked as outcomes of education.

The Cedefop review makes several conclusions and those which are most directly relevant for this literature review are the 'non-market benefits' (p. 26) of continuing vocational education and training (VET). These benefits are variously described as 'better health' (p. 6), 'longer lives', 'more satisfying leisure time' (p. 17), positive effects on children in the learner's family 'which can lead to higher levels of education for children' (p. 17) and 'greater civic responsibility which can lead to stronger and more stable democracies' (p. 18). Cedefop research has found the non-market benefits accruing to individuals include 'civic competences' and 'improved health-related behaviour' and 'political interest and interpersonal trust' (p. 26).

> For individuals, non-market benefits are commonly measured by positive psychological effects on individuals' motivation or attitudes, such as increasing self-esteem and self-confidence, especially among unemployed people.
>
> (Cedefop, 2013a, p. 26)

In the European context, continuing VET equates to non-formal and informal lifelong learning and is therefore most closely aligned with community education in the Irish context. It is acknowledged in the study that 'VET can be initial or continuing, formal or informal, classroom- or workplace-based, or both' and that this 'complicates collection of data' (p. 18). Therefore to extrapolate conclusions for community education must be done with caution pointing to the need for specific research on the market and non-market benefits of community education in Ireland.

The conclusion of chapter three in the Cedefop study outlining the benefits of VET makes an important final point:

> This argues for investment in VET being directed not only by economic considerations but also by social (market and non-market) returns. The problem lies in expressing the

> value of social (market and non-market) returns in money terms to make their scale visible.
>
> (Cedefop, 2013a, p. 31)

Clearly, the economy and monetary return from VET is a dominant paradigm of our time. Yet this ignores the social return from VET. There is a danger that if no direct monetary gain in terms of a wage can be demonstrated from participating in VET or non-formal and informal learning including community education, then these courses will be considered less a priority by cash-strapped governments. It is for this reason that VET, particularly non-formal and informal lifelong learning including community education are forced to put a monetary value on outcomes which are hard to quantify in monetary terms, i.e. empowerment, confidence, self-esteem. Yet these outcomes undoubtedly have a monetary value and the sector is rising to the challenge of putting a value on the social benefits in economic and monetary terms. The Cedefop study mentions McMahon's (1998) work in measuring the non-monetary or social benefits of lifelong learning as a useful guide. Further research on the non-economic or social benefits of lifelong learning from work undertaken by UK researchers in the field of adult continuing education is presented later in this section.

An earlier study *Vocational education and training is good for you* (Cedefop, 2011) describes the direct benefits to the labour market associated with the social benefits of vocational education and training (VET), quite apart from the economic benefits. This report examines the premise that:

> 'positive VET experience, promoting individual's self esteem, confidence and agency (self-directedness), skills which are becoming extremely valuable in the labour market, should enable labour market success. It should lead to further learning.'
>
> (Cedefop, 2011, p. 9)

The research examines both initial and continuing vocational education and training (IVET and CVET). Whilst CVET is more relevant to community education, it is argued in this paper that the research speaks to further education and training in general and community education in particular. The popular perception of vocational education may be instrumental, as in traditional manual and practical skills formation and indeed Cedefop's research points to the economic benefits in 'monetary returns' (p. 17), to be gained from VET. However, economic benefits are seen as only partially meeting the requirements of the labour market and this Cedefop study makes the case for recognition of how social benefits contribute to the labour market.

So what are these social benefits and what is their equivalence in economic return? Furthermore, what is their contribution to employability and labour market preparedness for learners? In summary, social benefits refer to; health benefits, 'positive changes in health outcomes

(measured by indicators such as self-rated health and lack of chronic health conditions)' (p. 9), civic participation, 'membership of organisations' and 'increased membership of voluntary organisations' (p. 9). The OECD has identified additional social outcomes, 'political interest and interpersonal trust' (OECD, 2009 cited in Cedefop, 2011, p. 12).

EU perspective on recognising non-formal and informal learning

Colardyn and Bjornavold (2004) document much of the thinking and rationale underpinning the EU's policy on recognising informal and non-formal learning. The validation of this kind of learning is 'very much related' to the Lisbon agenda of a 'knowledge-based economy' which places lifelong learning at the centre of 'competitiveness, employability, individual fulfillment and self-development' (p. 69). An overarching vision informs this recognition:

> The purpose is to make visible the entire scope of knowledge and experience held by an individual, irrespective of the context where the learning originally took place. For an employer it is a question of human resource management, for individuals a question of having the full range of skills and competences valued and for society a question of making full use of existing knowledge and experience.
>
> (Colardyn & Bjornavold, 2004, p. 69)

In terms similar to a later contribution from Werquin (2008), the authors emphasise visibility and value as key cornerstones to any system of recognition of informal and non-formal learning. They also point to the recognition system seeking to replicate that which is in place for formal learning. 'Validation of non-formal and informal learning is often linked to formal education and training' (p. 77) and defined according to that template. Colardyn and Bjornavold document the efforts undertaken by Cedefop (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training) to undertake an inventory of recognition practices across member states as well as the quest for agreement on common principles discussed earlier. The Council recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (Council, 2012) discussed earlier is the culmination of this work.

OECD perspective on recognising non-formal and informal learning

Werquin (2008) writing from an OECD vantage point, acknowledges the lack of consensus internationally around how non-formal and informal learning should be recognised, and accepts there is a strait jacket mentality of fitting both into the traditional modes of validation suitable for formal education. Werquin considers four aspects of the debate.

Firstly, in respect of definition, he refers to the 'uncertainty and disagreements' about the meaning and recognition of informal and non-formal learning (p. 143). However, he proposes

three qualities featuring in most definitions internationally; learning objectives, intentionality of learning and certification, though the last one features less. Recognition, he argues has become synonomous with accreditation in the formal sense. He argues there is a need to 'talk of recognition of non-formal and informal learning as opposed to validation or accreditation' (p. 144). Recognition is ultimately about how usable and visible both kinds of learning are in similar ways to formal learning.

Secondly, Werquin sets out the rationale for recognition of non-formal and informal learning. The recognition contributes to the learner's currency when approaching the labour market and/or progression on the lifelong learning pathways, as well as improving 'applicants' self-esteem as they become aware of their knowledge, skills and competence' (p. 145). He points to the tension that can arise between the award of a qualification based on the assessment of learning achieved in a non-formal or informal way, compared to the formal approach where the learner attends a structured programme, the perennial argument about whether 'qualifications are awarded to those who do not attend classes' (p. 145).

Thirdly, Werquin points to barriers and challenges preventing recognition frameworks, such as; stakeholder tensions e.g. private v public providers, social partners v government, the challenge of who determines standards, the educationalists or industry and fields of practice where non-formal and informal learning takes place. The barrier of cost is raised, e.g. should fees for non-formal and informal education be on a similar basis to formal education. There is also the challenge that systems of recognition for informal and non-formal learning may become ghettoised as catering only for marginalised groups, 'immigrants' whose qualifications are not recognised in the host country and 'those with no formal education' (p. 148).

Finally, Werquin argues, that realistically, while countries have instituted systems for recognition of informal and non-formal learning, this has tended to rely on the support of 'a small group of champions who constantly report about the difficulties they encounter when trying to promote this approach to lifelong learning' (p. 148). It would seem practice and solid commitment to such recognition requires more action to match the rhetoric of OECD member states.

Britain

National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education

Over the past two years quite a number of articles published in *Adults Learning*, the periodical of the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, make the case for continuing public investment in adult and community education in all its forms, formal, non-formal and informal

(Thomson, 2013; Spear, 2012, Sedgmore et al, 2010). This is seen as especially important in a time of economic and social crisis. The articles have been in response to the UK government's spending reviews since 2010.

More benefit than cost

Thomson (2013) argues for a rebalancing of the education budget to allocate more to the post 25 year age category, i.e. adult education. The raising of retirement age and increasing older population are proffered as reasons. He refers to the UK Department for Business, Innovation and Skills report *Measuring the economic impact of further education* (DBIS, 2011) in making his case:

> vocational qualifications delivered in the workplace, and apprenticeships delivered a return of £35 for every pound spent. Similarly, if spending on offender learning reduces recidivism there will be a saving in the criminal justice system.
>
> (Thomson, 2013, p. 5)

He also acknowledges the difficulties in measuring the 'full value of adult learning' (p. 5) and mentions the New Economics Foundation model, *social return on investment,* as well as NIACE's own econometric approaches, and the Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning (p. 5). These are discussed further in this literature review. He concludes with a warning to government that cutting public expenditure on adult learning would be 'counterproductive', leading to 'higher costs in other areas of public expenditure such as health, welfare benefits, criminal justice, and social cohesion' (p. 5).

Adult learners' week and employability

Spear (2012) reflects on the difference which the annual Adult Learners' Week in Wales is making in terms of value and impact in public spending terms. He addresses two questions; firstly, why divert money away from delivery of adult learning to promotion of adult learning at a time when funding is scarce, and secondly, how does adult learners' week get people back into work? (pp. 4-5). Responding to the first, he ably demonstrates the values in terms of partnership and the savings on individual provider budgets through collective advertisement of courses throughout the week. The focus of the campaign is also on those most 'hard to reach groups' (p. 5) and half of the 25,000 participants have 'little or no (prior) learning' (p. 5).

For the purposes of this literature review, Spear's response to the second question is of more relevance. Acknowledging that 'the post-16 policy arena is dominated by the skills agenda, with preparation for work being the main show in town' (p. 5), he argues that it is important to provide a wide variety of 'appealing activities' to encourage people to take up learning again. Taster courses such as 'First Aid for Parents' or 'Healthy Cooking on a Budget' (p. 5) are not to

be dismissed as they are vital to someone taking the first step back into learning toward employment, 'particularly those who may lack confidence' (p. 5). Developing confidence he asserts is 'a critical employability skill' (p.5).

Safeguarding adult learning from cuts

Following the 2010 comprehensive spending review (UK Government) which safeguarded or ring-fenced the adult and community learning budget from the overall 25% cut in further education, Sedgmore (2010) welcomed this protection, but expressed some concern at a decision to withdraw free tuition to entry level awards 'a first step on the ladder of employability for many people' (p. 9). Bolshin (cited in Sedgmore et al, 2010) similarly welcomes the protection, but feels the devil may be in the detail of the safeguard. He refers to cuts in adult learning emanating from other government departments, for example projects such as 'Take Part', 'Learning for Community Involvement' or 'Tackling Racial Inequality' (p. 11). Furthermore, cuts in local council budgets could result in closure of local services 'including those for adults, as well as libraries, theatres, museums, village halls and community centres' (p. 11), precisely the venues where adult learning needs to take place. Jarvis, Berkeley and Broughton (2012) point to the importance of locating provision in the community, and this is also a central tenet of community education.

Others express little praise for the UK government's sparing of adult learning, claiming the overall decision to cut further education by 25% represents 'an act of gross vandalism' (Macney cited in Sedgmore et al, 2010). The overall cuts to departmental budgets will hit the 'poorest households hardest, middle-income families and female public servants' (2/3rds of public servants are women)' according to Barber (cited in Sedgmore et al, 2010).

Ward (cited in Sedgmore et al, 2010) also welcomes the decision to maintain levels of funding for adult and community education stating that 'community-based education has an important role in supporting the learning and capacity-buiding that will be needed to deliver the empowered and confident communities promoted in the Big Society vision' (p. 14). The Conservative's big society idea seems as controversial as New Labour's third way. In the UK context could big society mean the opposite to big government? It may imply a divestment of the state's responsibility for its role in communities, especially those impacted by deprivation, poverty, racial conflict and neglect, whilst claiming it is devolving more power to communities away from central government.

Adult learning and dealing with unemployment

Uden (2009) reflects on the cycles of growth and recession and the impact on unemployment. He argues that in the face of this recession, it is important to know 'who the unemployed are

going to be this time' (p. 24). The assumption that the unemployed are 'predominantly unskilled' needs to be debunked. Having previously contributed to a REPLAN programme from 1984 to 1991, Uden has some experience of previous unemployment crises. Some aspects have not changed, 'unemployment is a debilitating experience and without help, work habits, self-confidence, even motivation, can ebb away if it persists over time' (p. 24). Key employability skills may be lost and Uden names these as generally agreed by employers as 'personal and interpersonal skills and basic IT skills' (p. 24). His observations are worth emphasizing:

> Learner-centred adult learning is a key way of instilling and maintaining these skills. Employability skills cannot in themselves easily be turned into a curriculum and 'taught'. Adult learning, if allowed to be flexible and learner-centred, can help people gain or maintain these 'softer' skills, which are key to employability.
>
> (Uden, 2010, p. 24)

Measuring the social benefits of adult and community education

Translating the positive impacts of adult and community education into an econometric format which appeals to decision makers is relatively new and not easily done. Whilst community educators are more convinced by narrative and qualitative testimony from learners themselves about the benefits of community education, much of this new quantitative language will seem unfamiliar and barren. Yet, at a purely pragmatic level, if it contributes to maintaining the level of resources for the most vulnerable groups during hard times, then it is more likely to be embraced, albeit with some reluctance. Four such measurements are considered below.

The first measure outlined in the UK Department for Business, Innovation and Skill's research paper on *measuring the economic impact of further education* (DBIS, 2011) was to assess precisely that by developing a 'model' to assess the impact of further education on 'providing people with the skills they need in the labour market' (p. 2). The calculation in the BIS paper is based on a 'net present value' NPV (p. 5) of the difference between benefits and costs of participating in further education calculated over the person's working life. Benefits are expected to accrue in terms of increased wages and increased employment for those participating in further education compared to those not participating. Costs to be deducted in the calculation include the public funded costs e.g. tuition, a portion of centre overheads, state support for fees and foregone costs e.g. the productivity value of employment time is foregone where time is spent on a course.

Taking the most basic courses 'Basic Skills' and 'Developmental Learning' in a range of FE courses provided in the UK, the NPV for someone who completes this level is £47,000, and the NPV for every one pound of state funding spent providing the course gives a return of £25 (p. 9). The research findings conclude that 'the NPV of qualifications started in 2008/09 is

estimated to be £75bn over the years in which successful learners remain in the workforce' and represents a return of around '£35-£40 per pound of funding' invested by the state in further education (p. 5).

The second measure comes from the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education in the UK who also embarked on quantifying the value of adult learning in recent years. Fujiwara (2012) presents an analysis of the effect of adult learning on different domains in life. The four domains are; health, employment, social relationships and volunteering (p. 1). He uses a *well-being valuation approach (WV)*. Not only does this study present the model which is similar to the NPV model above, but it also presents the results 'proving' the impact of adult learning.

> The Well-being Valuation (WV) approach estimates monetary values by looking at how a good or service impacts on a person's well-being and finding the monetary equivalent of this impact.
>
> (Fujiwara, 2012, p. 1)

For example, the WV method looks at the effect of adult learning on health and 'seeks to measure the impact of the change in health (due to adult learning) on well-being' (p. 1). In this research, Fujiwara analysed standardised data collected as part of the British Household Panel Survey (equivalent to the Quarterly National Household Survey in Ireland). The WV methodology relies on statistical formulae and regression analysis and therefore is unlikely to be useful for community educators who are by and large not statisticians. Fujiwara is enthusiastic about the approach and he states that it 'has gained popularity recently in UK Government policy-making, as demonstrated by the new HM Treasury Green Book guidance on valuation techniques' (p. 3). Provided the model doesn't require the user to understand the complex statistics, but simply to input data to gain output values, then it may be possible to use.

Fujiwara reports that 'adult learning, as measured by people's participation in part-time courses, has positive effects on all four domains' (p. 12). Results are reported in terms of statistically significant positive benefits. Focusing on employment, for our purposes in this literature review, 'taking a part-time course in the previous year has a statistically significant positive effect on the likelihood of someone being employed in the current year' (p. 12). Similarly, taking part in a course increases the likelihood of volunteering by 4% which is also statistically significant. These positive benefits are then converted into monetary values which indicate the gains in monetary terms.

A third measure is drawn from the Matrix Knowledge Group (2009). As part of a series of papers examining the public value of future lifelong learning, the NIACE called on the Matrix Knowledge Group (2009) to prepare its third paper *lifelong learning and well-being* addressing

the question 'how far learning can contribute to well-being' (p. 1). As a precursor to Fujiwara's work it bears similarities. The authors cite various studies on the relationship between educational qualifications and well-being, however they find 'very little research' specific to lifelong learning and wellbeing (p. 3). In this study they take a subjective definition of well-being as a 'psychological phenomenon characterised by feelings of pleasure and displeasure, happiness and sadness, and satisfaction and dissatisfaction' (Dolan & White, 2007, cited in MKG, 2009, p. 4). The Matrix Knowledge Group refer to new ways of measuring social outcomes and putting a monetary value on these outcomes. Again the British Household Panel Survey provides a reliable and recognised data set which can be analysed for valuing lifelong learning interventions. This survey has included questions on formal and informal educational participation for different age cohorts for a good many years now. The survey also includes a general health questionnaire and a life-satisfaction scale. The authors therefore found it possible to carry out correlations between lifelong learning and health for example.

However unlike Fujiwara, the purpose of the Matrix Knowledge Group research is not to present the model, but rather present the results. These confirm for example that people in the 25 to 44 year age group in the UK are the 'most likely' to take part in part-time informal education. A greater proportion of those who are employed take part in both formal and informal learning than those who are unemployed. Participation in part-time informal learning shows that only 5% of those who are unemployed, 3% of those who are inactive, and 5% of those who are retired participate in this form of learning. However, it is clear for those who do participate that levels of well-being are reported as better compared to those who do not participate.

> It demonstrates that those in part-time education, either formal or informal, or who have undertaken part-time education at some point in the previous year, have a greater level of well-being than those who are either not in part-time education or have not recently undertaken part-time education.
>
> (Matrix Knowledge Group, 2009, p. 10)

The fourth econometric worth mentioning in this section is the New Economics Foundation's *social return on investment* (Cabinet Office & Office of the Third Sector (UK), 2009). In the UK government's guide on *sroi*, the aim is to provide a standardised method of value that goes beyond financial value to include social and environmental value. Social return on investment is based on social accounting and cost-benefit analysis. While *sroi* is about value rather than money' it nevertheless 'uses monetary values' (p. 8) to represent the value of social, economic and environmental outcomes resulting from activities. It is based on seven principles:

- involving stakeholders
- understand what changes
- value the things that matter

- only include what is material
- do not over-claim
- be transparent
- verify the result

(CO & OTS, 2009, p. 9)

In assessing the impact of an activity such as a community education intervention, the steps in the process will involve establishing inputs, outputs and outcomes and monetising these. The impact can be identified when factors are eliminated which would have occurred anyway had the intervention not been implemented (p. 10). Westerman, Schifferes and Maguire's (2013) case study of *sroi* involving four adult residential colleges in England shows that 'quantifying the unquantifiable' (p. 37) is not impossible.

At EU level there is less evidence of a widely used application to capture the wider benefits of lifelong learning. The Directorate General for Informatics have developed a tool called VAST Reveal the value of your projects (Directorate General for Informatics (EU), 2013).

The significance of these four measures of the social benefits of adult and community education is that they exist at all. Adult and community educators would challenge a culture in education which is fixated with numbers, measurement, measureable outcomes etc. Too much of the lifechanging impact of community education is not easily measured in quantitative ways. In a sector which values the qualitative it is significant that the sector is now proving itself equally innovative in measuring the impacts in terms of market and monetary equivalents as other sectors of the economy.

Employability research: A clear line of sight to work

The adult and community education sector in the UK has been confronted by similar challenges to that of the Irish sector over the past two decades. The global economic crisis and its specific impact on the UK has had similar though less devastating effects than those experienced in Ireland. The change from a new labour to a conservative-led government has seen some shift of emphasis in social and economic discourse, though critical adult education commentators (Crowther, 2011; Tett, 2010) trace the continuing dominance of an economic purpose paradigm at the heart of education policy and provision. They argue this paradigm narrowly positions education at the service of a 'skills' and 'employability' agenda set by the captains of industry, meeting the needs of the neoliberal market economy.

It is against this backdrop that Williams (2013) reviews the new report of the Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning, aptly entitled '*It's about work: Excellent adult vocational teaching and learning*' launched in March 2013 (CAVTL, 2013a). Williams, who is head of the commission, calls on all involved to 'raise their game' so as to 'respond to and

prepare us all for changes in work, advances in knowledge and technology, and the increasing demand for people with higher levels of skills' (Williams, 2013, p. 12). The demanding language will irk many in adult education who see government as divesting itself of any responsibility for regulating or shaping the economy. There is some hope however in the commission's regard to the importance of the 'social benefits' of participation in vocational programmes. The report points to two key factors in achieving the above goals, firstly '*a clear line of sight to work*' (p. 12) and secondly, employer-provider collaboration. The latter will pose challenges for non-formal, non-accredited provision such as community education, as clear lines of sight to employment are not easily predicted as an outcome of community education. However, a clear line of sight in the other direction from the workplace often points back to the first step involving a community education course.

The idea of employability

The dominance of employability as a theme in policy making at EU level has been considered earlier and this idea is also dominant in UK policy. In a recent research paper, Ball (2009) provides some explanation of the origins of the concept of employability in public discourse. Referring to the UK Government skills strategy white paper (DfES, 2003, cited in Ball, 2009, p.39) he reflects the view that rapid changes in the market economy with increasing globalisation, movement of capital and technological advances, has meant the 'job for life' or employment for life has been replaced with the idea of 'employability' for life. In this article, Ball goes on to make the compelling argument that employability serves the interests of capital. In tracing the relationship between labour and capital from the 1970s and 1980s, Ball argues that further education and lifelong learning have become subservient to the 'needs of industry' (Department of Innovation, Universities & Skills, 2007, cited in Ball, 2009, p. 45).

Having unmasked this 'turn' which had not yet been 'recognised' by the mainstream, Ball does not suggest a way for adult and community education to approach this narrow instrumentalist agenda where 'the role of learning is to help workers fit the needs of industry by becoming work-centred, efficient and compliant employees' (p. 52). However, in a later article considered in the practice section of this literature review, Ball (2011) examines adult learning in the UK trade union movement and finds some space for asserting worker rights. This has some relevance for community education in seeking to assert learner rights in shaping the economy rather than being passive and subservient to the needs of the economy.

Ireland

AONTAS The National Adult Learning Organisation

AONTAS commissioned research in 2009 as part of an extensive enquiry into community education practice in Ireland. The research covered both statutory or governmental provision of community education through VECs and non-statutory or non-governmental provision in community education delivered by independently managed groups. The latter includes community development projects and voluntary organizational member groups of AONTAS. In this section the outcomes of both research studies will be examined with particular reference to what the findings say about employability and labour activation.

The first research study (Bailey, Breen and Ward, 2011) examined Department of Education and Skills funded community education through the 33 VECs. This funding came through the *Adult Literacy and Community Education Scheme (ALCES).* Whilst this research focused on statutory provision delivered through VEC community education facilitators, a non-statutory element, *the Community Strand of the Back to Education Initiative (BTEI)* was also included in the enquiry. The report does draw some comparisons between both, but these are less relevant to the specific purpose of this literature review.

This research was extensive and involved a survey of 683 learners, eleven case studies, surveys of VEC personnel and interviews with key informants (p. 9). In relation to the target groups catered for by DES funded community education (approx 35,000 reported by VECs for this research), between 33% (ALCES) and 39% (BTEI) were 'unemployed' (pp. 47-48). 45% were 'not in the labour market' (p. 48). The respondents to the research indicate their experiences and views concerning a range of community education outcomes considered under the following headings; access persistence and retention, civic and social engagement, health outcomes, progression outcomes, contribution to a fair, just and prosperous Ireland. Whilst employability and labour market outcomes feature across the headings, the most relevant are those concerning progression in chapter nine of the study (pp. 159-173).

45% of respondents reported that the reason they took part in community education courses was 'to improve my employment prospects and get a job' (p. 108). Furthermore the aggregate of responses relating to improving employment prospects and gaining a qualification amount to 'almost half the learners' in the study (p. 109). Nevertheless the report concludes that particular target groups 'lone parents, disadvantaged men, the homeless, younger people with disabilities, Travellers and ethnic minorities, and the unemployed are being less effectively targeted for community education' (p. 43). For those unemployed who are engaged in DES community education provision, what employability outcomes are evident?

This research does not reveal a cohort of learners who prior to taking up a community education course were unemployed and then gain employment after the course. Such a simplistic linear outcome is not traced here. What is significant however is the desire among learners for progression to an accredited course or qualification which will in time lead to a job. Again, the DES-funded community education which is non-accredited and non-formal is viewed as an important building block for progression to 'further education and training' according to 64% of providers and for 'labour market progression' according to 30% of providers (pp. 162-163). An analysis of the learner responses to the survey on what progression they wished for reveals that 'learning a new skill' (70%) and to 'do a non-certified course with this group or centre' (55%) feature highest. However, 23% wanted 'to get a job because I am unemployed', 16% wanted to 'get a better job' and 33% wanted to 'get advice on employment/education' (p. 164).

A conclusion not drawn from the study itself, but suggested here is that even though community education does not specifically set out to place a participant in a job at the end of a course, it is clear that participants are choosing community education with these employability outcomes in mind.

The second AONTAS research study (Bailey, Ward and Goodrick, 2011) examined the outcomes and impact of what is termed the 'social action model of community education' (p. 22). Both studies refer to the definitions of community education with reference to Lovett's (2003) typology (cited in Bailey et al, 2011, p. 22). It is accepted that there is a community service approach and a social or structural change approach in community education. It is claimed in this later report that DES-funded community education shows evidence of a more community service approach whereas independently-managed providers show evidence of a social change or social action approach in their work (p. 22). It is not intended in this literature review to engage in debate about what is the more authentic approach in community education or who is doing it, since the settings and circumstances are often complex. As the report acknowledges, 'all four models are evident in the implementation of ALCES funded community education' (p. 23) whereas independent groups affiliated to AONTAS tend to pursue a 'social action model'. It might be expected that there would be less evidence of employability or labour activation outcomes in this second study, however this is not the case.

This research involved 285 learners, 27 centres and interviews with key informants. According to the findings, the main motivation for taking up community education in independently managed centres is 'the desire to improve self-confidence' (p. 8). Whilst claiming to 'hold the space' (p. 20) which is diminishing for a social model of community education, the report calls

for ‘a distinct funding line for community education’ (p. 11). While the report would seem to favour the social action model delivered by independently-managed groups over DES-funded community education, what seems more urgent is the need to continue to fund, resource and recognise community education in whatever form given the valuable outcomes it achieves.

22% of the sample of 285 learners surveyed were unemployed, with 16% who were long-term unemployed (p. 28). The top courses provided by the centres were social, personal and vocational in content reflecting learners’ needs ‘to improve self-confidence and to gain qualifications and improve employment prospects’ (p. 80). Furthermore ‘bridging to the labour market’ is important to learners who believe courses should lead to accreditation (p. 80). In response to questions regarding reasons for participation in community education, ‘70% of (220) learners wanted to improve their employment prospects’ (p. 71).

While the independently-managed centres see community education as an intervention for social change to challenge exclusion, to empower disadvantaged communities to create structural and social change, it is clear from learners’ perspectives that ‘getting a job’ and ‘gaining a qualification’ are desirable outcomes and are not incompatible with the objectives of a social action model of community education. However, overall, the report concludes that structural change outcomes are less apparent (p. 9) than would be wished for in a social action model of community education, i.e. the structures and systems which create poverty, unemployment and labour class inequality remain.

National Economic and Social Forum NESF

Labour market vulnerability is a theme which the National Economic and Social Forum addressed in a 2006 report. The report drew on findings of two case studies carried out under the same theme in an urban and rural setting, North Dublin and Donegal / Sligo (Duggan and Loftus, 2005).

From a research and policy perspective, the NESF report (2006) *creating a more inclusive labour market* is noteworthy because it was written at a time of unprecedented economic growth and high employment during the boom, yet there were many individuals and groups excluded from the labour market. The labour market vulnerability experienced by these groups persisted despite jobs growth. The report points to Ireland’s poor record on equality ‘one of the highest levels of market income inequality’ (p. ix) and ‘51 out of 56 countries in terms of equality of economic opportunity for women’ (p. xiii) among the reasons why particular groups experience labour market vulnerability. The earlier research report (Duggan and Loftus, 2005) identify the groups affected; ‘the long term unemployed, lone parents, ex-drug users, ex-offenders, members

of the Traveller community, asylum seekers and refugees, people with disability, women returners' (pp. 14-15).

A key issue which the NESF report raised was the issue of 'discrimination and prejudice' on the part of employers (p. xi). This is a theme which is not adequately addressed in current labour market activation strategies. The INOU conference report (2012) referred to earlier described how 'many employers have not traditionally regarded the public employment service as their first choice as a source from which to recruit staff' (p. 29).

The NESF report goes on to say that unemployment also contributed to 'low self-esteem' (p. xi) and job loss in the 'manufacturing' sector (p. x) created a cohort of people with 'low-skills' and/or 'obsolete skills' (xii) who were labour market vulnerable.

The response recommended by the NESF included 'an expansion of part-time, flexible opportunities by training and education providers for both those at work and those seeking work with a focus on courses leading to qualifications' (p. xvii). Furthermore, education and training aimed at improving 'the employability of people' (p. xvii) needs to happen at times and locations which suit learners.

In the years following 2006, community education continued to work with the most vulnerable groups in the midst of an economic boom, and the statistics presented in this literature review bear this out with an average 50,000 participants annually. Flexible learning at times and places to suit the community group is a hallmark of community education in Ireland. Unfortunately, very little has changed in the intervening years for the cohort of people who had always experienced labour market vulnerability, and community education continues to reach out to these individuals and groups.

National Economic and Social Council NESC

The role of the National Economic and Social Council is to provide advice to the Taoiseach on 'strategic issues for Ireland's economic and social development' (NESC, 2013). Over the past twenty years, the council has undertaken research and evaluation on key policies and programmes undertaken by the state and is therefore well placed to assess the impact of the economic boom and recession alike. One such study *Supports and services for unemployed jobseekers* (NESC, 2011) includes chapters on employability and activation respectively. The financial constraints impacting on public policy are stated at the outset:

> 'the recession is bringing policy makers, operating within exceptionally tight fiscal constraints, to want a much improved evidence base for identifying what training or

> education delivers best and for whom, and to seek better outcomes from given levels of public spending on Further Education and Training (FET).
>
> (NESC, 2011, p. 9)

This report also comments on the quality of 'labour market intelligence' in the sense that jobseekers are 'entitled to courses' where not only content, but also 'teaching methods' and 'pedagogies' are relevant to 'how the world of work is evolving' (p. 10). Surveys of skills needs in the economy therefore needs to be reliable, comprehensive and relevant. The NESC study argues that 'only a co-ordinated approach on the part of employers, educational and training providers, labour market experts and policy-makers will deliver what unemployed people really need and want' (2011, p. 10). Such collaboration needs to happen on assessing jobs potential in alternative strategies such as climate change, preventive and primary health, responsible tourism and sustainable agriculture to name but a few.

The national skills strategy may need to emerge as creative and innovative rather than passive and reactive to the market 'out there'. In that context, community education is at the fore in supporting sustainable communities with innovative responses to disadvantage and poverty. Some examples are included in the practice sections of this review.

Research on active citizenship in Ireland

Returning to active citizenship, a central tenet of EU policy and Irish policy, research is lacking on the contribution which citizenship in the form of voluntary activity has made to the labour market. For example, it is clear that the generation of employment in the community development sector during the 1990s and 2000s has been largely due to the voluntary commitment of volunteer members of management committees in the 100plus family resource centres and 150plus formerly independent community development projects. Of course the state did provide the funding, but it was dependent on there being a voluntary management committee in place in each project to draw down the funding. This funding was envisaged as sustainable and created on average 2 to 3 posts in each centre. In time volunteers themselves gained skills and capacity to apply for positions in the centres. Community educators and support workers had a role in supporting and training volunteer members of management committees.

Academic research on citizenship takes the broader political view of citizenship involving more than volunteering. Gaynor (2011) is critical of the narrow portrayal of active citizenship espoused by the Taskforce on Active Citizenship in Ireland. Her main argument is that the taskforce equate active citizenship with volunteering, helping out, self-help and self-reliance. Active citizenship is therefore depoliticised and robbed of its political and critical dimensions which locate the problems of poverty and disadvantage (to which active citizenship is often aimed at alleviating) in structural inequalities of wealth distribution, injustice and lack of power.

Gaynor provides a detailed analysis of the meaning of active citizenship, including communitarian, and civic republican traditions. A more active political engagement 'that recognises the agency of people and communities to shape their own futures' (p. 33) is envisaged in the civic republican tradition. She also unpacks social capital and community development, challenging 'apolitical' (p. 32) conceptions of these as well.

Social capital, she argues is a particular favourite in Irish government and state circles in recent times, particularly the concept as understood by Putnam (2000). Putnam described social capital as the value of social networks between homogenous groups (bonding) and heterogeneous groups (bridging). Stronger social networks can translate into reduced isolation, exchange of favours and safer communities. However, Putnam's version of social capital fails to differentiate between affluent and deprived communities.

Gaynor resurrects Bourdieu's more critical, Marxist conception of social capital. Whereas Putnam usefully describes the decline of civic participation and volunteering, in terms of personal and community loss to the 'stock' of social capital, with negative consequences for networks and well-being in society, Bourdieu views social capital as unequally distributed in society, along similar lines to wealth (economic capital). Social and cultural capital can be accumulated and reproduced in the field of power from generation to generation, in similar ways to material or financial capital. Those with more stock of social capital tend to keep it in their families and communities and pass it on to the next generation. Essentially, Bourdieu's version of social capital is about the dynamic reproduction of inequality (Bourdieu, 1996).

Regarding active citizenship, Gaynor, is very critical of the dominant idea behind active citizenship in Ireland. She concludes that the taskforce on active citizenship is an effective cover for the state to appear to be doing something about addressing issues in community. Problems of poverty caused by structural inequality are to be solved by self-help. Through volunteering, communities themselves need to 'get on with it' (p. 39). Why would the state leave the alleviation of poverty for active citizens to sort out?. Gaynor argues the answer lies in money. The reliance of the state on attracting foreign direct investment has resulted in the diversion of financial resources to attract foreign multinationals to locate in Ireland (e.g. low corporation tax). This implies less funding to spend on social protection and combating poverty in poor communities.

In the practice section, we will consider a number of good practice examples from the community education field which demonstrate the positive contribution of active citizenship which moves beyond policy aspiration and critical commentary toward effective action.

Conclusion

This part of the literature review has examined EU, UK and Irish research papers, academic journals and periodicals on further education and training with a view to its impact on employability and active citizenship. What emerges is a clear picture that FET in its various forms including non-formal and informal learning contributes in positive ways not only to social objectives but also to employability objectives. The research also indicates that considerable work continues in the sector in relation to measurement of these outcomes.

4. PRACTICE

Introduction

At the outset, it must be acknowledged that there is a dearth of documented practice examples in the literature of adult and community education, particularly where the practice demonstrates a connectedness to employability or labour market outcomes. Practitioners are usually heavily engaged in planning, co-ordinating and recruiting for courses as well as evaluation and reporting at the conclusion of courses. Much of the documented practice may therefore be used for reporting purposes to funders and may form part of funding applications. Therefore documented practice has not tended to appear in the public domain in research papers. This is not to excuse the need for practitioners to document good practice examples which demonstrate what works in terms of empowerment, collective action, political and structural changes, as well as personal and employability benefits of community education.

As stated earlier, the Community Education Facilitators Association (2011) have called for the establishment of 'systems that will measure outcomes, track progression and set down qualitative indicators' along with 'an ongoing research budget' (p. 14). CEFA also cite European backing for such research in the *Action Plan on Adult Learning 2007-2010* (European Commission, 2007). The action plan 'outlined the need for a research infrastructure to support practice-to-policy feedback' (CEFA, 2011, p. 11).

This section presents a small sample of evidence drawn from researchers, community educators and academics of good practice examples of how community education has been supporting individuals to prepare for entry or re-entry into the labour market. This work is being done at a collective community level and also empowers individuals to realise their potential as active citizens. Much of this education work has used a non-formal and informal learning approach. As outlined in previous sections, non-formal and informal learning is gaining significant recognition across the EU as an important strategy for lifelong learning which contributes to employability and active citizenship.

The aim of this part of the literature review has been to trawl the literature for good practice examples which adhere to authentic values of empowerment and community-based approaches inherent to community education. In assessing what works, quantitative and qualitative evidence is assembled where possible. Some of the examples do not explicitly describe a strictly community education intervention per se, however inferences are drawn where a community education approach is evident in the practice example. Examples are drawn from work in Ireland, Scotland, England and Canada.

Employable

Women's community education, community employment and labour activation

Patterson and Dowd (2010) document a case study of women's community education in the Irish context of the economic crisis and how the project contributes to labour activation whilst retaining the core philosophy and approach which is unique to women's community education. This community-based women's project supports women 'trapped in a cycle of welfare dependency and isolation' (p. 121). The centre runs a FÁS funded community employment scheme specifically designed using a women's community education approach. Women have the opportunity to gain valuable workplace experience in the nursery / childcare facility of the project as well as the reception areas. They also participate in learning designed to meet their needs. The educational approach is described as:

> a potent collective education process that supports the empowerment of women and seeks to address the socio-political aspects of women's experience through collective activism.
>
> (Patterson & Dowd, 2010, p. 123)

The positive outcomes for participants are reflected in expressions such as having 'space to develop confidence and learn or re-learn skills', 'I didn't feel intimidated – the atmosphere made all the difference', and testimony to the value of the 'collective' approach, 'we helped each other, and encouraged each other' (p. 128). Clearly, there is value in women's community education designed and delivered by women and for women in the community. This contrasts with the experience of 20% of trainees who reported higher stress levels associated with assessments on accredited courses (p. 128).

The success of the programme is reflected in the progression rate into external employment which is 70%. (20 of the 34 women participants). This is significant for women who were previously long term unemployed.

At the outset the authors refer to the bulk of education and training provision being provided directly by FÁS and VECs (p. 121), however, their account demonstrates the value of statutory and community engagement at the community grassroots level. The article also points to the value of a third sector approach to employment generation which is neither exclusively public nor exclusively private.

Community education participants 'giving back' to communities

The City of Galway VEC community education programme participated in collaborative research funded by Grundtvig involving a number of providers across Europe. The outcome of the research was the production of a *good practice manual* documenting *experiences and*

methodologies in the training of vulnerable individuals, groups and communities. All partners identify a number of best practice examples in their work with vulnerable adults. City of Galway VEC adopt a 'bottom-up' approach which involves learners as 'full partners' in community education. A direct impact in terms a labour or employment dividend arises from an initiative of the City of Galway VEC in the development of the Diploma in Community Development and Community Education in cooperation with the university, NUI Galway. Since the course was established '80 people from vulnerable communities have now trained as community educators and are actively engaged in working back in their communities' (Grundtvig Partnerships, 2012, p. 11).

Another Grundtvig partner based in Portugal APDES, a not-for-profit organization working with 'unemployed people, prisoners, drug addicts and sex workers amongst others' (p. 4) describes how their training has a positive impact by including peer educators in the drug rehabilitation and harm reduction programmes. These educators had themselves overcome addiction and acted as a 'role model' (p. 10) to recovering users. Their involvement had the effect of 'promoting new employment opportunities for drug users' (p. 15).

Community education participant testimonies

Every year as part of its Adult Learners' Festival, AONTAS, the Irish National Adult Learning Organization hosts a lobby for learning day. In 2013, this event focused on 'the role of community education in serving the needs of people most distant from education and training, and the labour market, and as a valid form of activation' (AONTAS, 2013, p. 2). The seminar involved a cross section of community education learners and providers. Key policy makers including the Minister for Training and Skills, Mr. Ciaran Cannon, T.D. participated in the event. The lobby for learning day considered community education's contribution under a number of themes including; community education as an essential labour activation measure, a second chance at education and training, offering tailored supports, offering choice and leading to employment, as well as generating social purpose objectives such as better civic engagement and better health (AONTAS, 2013).

Some of the testimony of community education participants provides further evidence of the important role which community education plays in preparing people for the workplace. These testimonies quoted below reflect the importance of community education in confidence building, personal development and improved self-esteem as well as providing a stepping stone to the labour market and a future career or course of studies. These testimonies are presented under a number of headings below.

Employment:

> *Learners talked about how community education has assisted them in reaching their goals of achieving qualifications which can lead to good quality employment both within and outside the sector (p. 4).*
>
> *Without community education supports such as personal development and mentoring I wouldn't have gained the confidence to secure employment (p.8).*
>
> *I was brought back into the work environment through community education, I now have a full time job and my life couldn't be better. (p. 8).*

Confidence and self-esteem:

> *My confidence was diminished to the stage where it was almost impossible to apply for positions as I would get another rejection. My mentor has supported me to keep going and not get discouraged. (p. 5)*
>
> *After feeling isolated with low self-esteem community education offered me a new lease of life. (p. 5)*

A stepping stone:

> *I needed the time to try out courses and test my own abilities before I could take on something more serious. (p.5)*
>
> *Community education gave me more choices about what I wanted to do. I completed a few taster courses to help me decide which course to take on, I am now doing a course I love and I plan to apply for my Master's next year. (p. 6)*

A trade union model for community-based learning for employability

Earlier we considered the idea of employability described by Ball (2009) and his misgivings about employability from an adult critical education perspective. In a later article on labour and trade unions (Ball, 2011), there are signs that new arrangements in trade unionism with the appointment of union learning representatives (ULRs) across the UK heralds an opportunity for trade unions to assert worker confidence once again, and to take back some control. This represents a shift because 'organised learning in the workplace has historically been the responsibility of employers' (Felstead et al., 2002 cited in Ball, 2011, p. 50). In Ball's study, URLs have clearly increased the uptake in work-based learning with 615,000 course places accessed since 1998, half of which '336,225 occurred between 2006 and 2008' (p. 55) when URLs were appointed. It is also clear that the majority who took up learning options were workers with lower educational attainment.

> it is beyond doubt that in workplaces with URLs there has been an increase in participation by those traditionally excluded.
>
> (Ball, 2011, p. 57)

Whilst this article documents positive developments in engaging non-traditional learners in workplace learning, there are some lessons applicable for the community-based learning. The scope for partnership between those in work and those out of work is enormous. Historically,

community education drew inspiration from trade unionism in its development in Dublin City (Kelleher & Whelan, 1992, p. 4). Similar partnerships are worth tapping into where workers engaging in workplace learning could bring this experience to bear in their local communities among those who lack the confidence to 'try a course'.

Active in the Labour Market

Responding to participant learning needs

Slevin's (2009) account of her community work in one of the most deprived areas of the state, along the border of east Donegal is a good example of how to balance the longer term social change objectives of community education, on the one hand, with the very practical labour market skills training, on the other. The area was particularly disadvantaged, being close to the border, 'the unemployment rate in St. Johnston was 19.2%, more than double the national average' (p. 49). Bear in mind, this was 2006 during the economic boom. Whist the national picture of Ireland in 2006 portrayed a booming economy and low joblessness, there were many areas where deprivation and unemployment were particularly severe.

Slevin describes community education work with a group of unemployed men on the 'Accelerate Programme, a minibus driver training programme with a difference' (p. 55). The minibus driver training programme was not solely that, it also incorporated first aid, child protection, passenger assistance training as well. The Accelerate programme also included FETAC level 3 communications and basic computers and was run in the local Family Resource Centre with funding from FÁS, the VEC and Department of Social and Family Affairs.

Slevin describes the ethos underpinning her work as a community educator which is shared with community development. Community development aims to bring about 'social change linked to social justice, using a process that is collective, participative and empowering' (Lloyd, 2000 cited in Slevin, 2009, p. 50). Recalling Connolly's (1996) assertion that adult education and community development are interdependent, Slevin sees 'conscientisation' (p. 52) as a vital foundation for her work. This awakening of people's awareness to ask such questions as why there is unemployment in their area and why the area has been forgotten can lead the community to question social, political and economic structures. Ultimately communities take collective action to change these structures.

Slevin is first to acknowledge that the Accelerate programme poses 'a contradiction' (p. 56). On the face of it the course appears to be more oriented to meeting the needs of the economy, i.e. trained bus drivers, than empowering people for collective action as described above. However,

she argues that before collective action for social change is realised, people must first be engaged through courses which address their individual felt needs.

Community education starts where people are at, identifying their needs and working with learners from that base. Empowerment is a clear objective of community education and this usually starts with careful foundation work. There is often a practical dimension to the community education provided. The minibus driver training course described by Slevin is one way to engage men in what will lead to benefits in varied ways to support their re-entry into the labour market.

> Community educators and activists operating from a community development model often have to reconcile their critical perspectives with the needs of communities and recognise that personal and social change is slow and requires innovative approaches.
>
> (Slevin, 2009, p. 58)

What Slevin is pointing to here is the dilemma which community educators experience in reconciling the desire to bring about transformation of the root causes of unemployment, on the one hand, and responding to the immediate desire of learners to find work in the shorter term. The tension lies between the immediate needs of the men on the programme to gain skills for work whilst at the same time the need to change socio-economic structures and policies which create and maintain unemployment and poverty. The first need is easier to identify whereas the second is harder to realise. In this case men needed practical skills for employment, while at the same time the community needed support and empowerment to overcome its marginalisation as a border community. Community educators, like community development workers, negotiate these diverse demands in the work.

> The evaluation of the programme demonstrated the success of the programme and it reaffirmed the importance of building community education programmes around the needs of the participants, not delivering a one size fits all programme.
>
> (Slevin, 2009, p. 57)

Slevin's account affirms empowerment for social justice as the goal of community education. Crucially, this starts by responding to people's needs. The immediate need in a jobless community is to find work. Slevin's account shows that while striving for social justice, it is possible to respond in creative ways to support people in deprived areas to prepare for employment as well.

Individual, collective and political outcomes in community education

In an earlier research study on community education in Donegal, Galligan (2008) documents the experience of providers and participants involved in programmes with a 'clear social justice focus and a social change agenda' (p. 5). This study is included in this section as it speaks to practice enquiry also.

The approach of community educators is really important in the work. Outreach work or 'neighbourhood work' is where the community educators 'connect with local communities' (p. 5), encouraging those who may be afraid or need support to come along to join others in the centre. One group using this approach found it effective in recruiting 'hard to reach' women participants, however 'fewer (groups) engage in neighbourhood work and door-to-door calls' (p. 47).

Galligan sounds a word of caution regarding a narrow focus on the labour market:

> Policy makers' emphasis on social inclusion via the labour markets rather than creating social solidarity may also be impacting upon the kind of community education being delivered.
>
> (Galligan, 2008, p. 8)

The 'radical agenda' which features strongly in women's community education is, she argues, in danger of getting lost by using community education as 'an access route to the labour force' (p. 25).

However, the research points to a range of outcomes which fit two different meanings of community education. All groups view community education as delivering 'individual and collective benefits' such as improved skills for the workplace, whereas fewer groups are concerned with 'political' and 'collective action' for social change (p. 55). The impact of community education reported by participants and providers reflect a broad spectrum; improved individual confidence, raising of the skills level, positive gains for family life, strengthening of leadership in the community and awareness of structural inequality where this is a focus. The individual and collective benefits featured more strongly than the political outcomes of community education yet there is 'crossover between the different layers' (p. 37). Among the individual outcomes, 'progression to further education and employment (17 responses)' featured alongside 'self-development (37 responses)' as important reasons for engaging with community education (p. 36).

Community education and health interventions

Co. Sligo VEC participated in another Grundtvig collaboration *community education across borders* (Grundtvig, 2010) which documents the programmes and methodologies in adult and community education in border areas and interfaces across the EU. Co. Sligo VEC based in one of the six southern border counties in Ireland participates in a number of EU cross-border programmes such as the EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation. One example of the work with which Co. Sligo VEC is involved is the Sligo Traveller Women Heath Care Progamme. The aim of the course is 'to prepare Traveller participants to avail of primary health care training and to become skilled primary health care/ community health workers within their own

community in county Sligo' (p. 16). In labour market terms, the outcome of the course therefore has a direct employment outcome. The social outcome includes better health gain for Traveller women and the Traveller community in general. The Traveller primary health care intervention has been developed in a number of health regions across Ireland.

Building confidence and self-esteem

Evoy and McDonnell (2011) describe a number of outcomes of the City of Waterford VEC's community education work with community centres and participants. The research report draws on qualitative data generated from 83 people in focus groups and interviews involving 13 learners and 7 CWVEC staff. It also draws on quantitative data from questionnaires returned by 64 learners (p. 25). A high proportion of the respondents were aged 66 or older (56%), therefore it is unsurprising that few (14%) felt that 'getting a job' was a relevant outcome for this group who likely include retired people (p. 44). At the same time, the employment potential of community education is confirmed by a majority of respondents (85%) who confirmed that 'their self-esteem and confidence has improved' and they had gained 'new skills' (p. 38). As we have seen in the Cedefop research self-esteem and self-confidence are important pre-requisites for accessing employment. The Waterford research cautions against losing the space occupied by community education:

> The focus is going back on 18-35, unemployed, men and everything is moving in the direction of labour market outcomes….this space is in danger, under threat.' (VEC/ Partner Organisation).
>
> (Evoy & McDonnell, 2011, p. 47)

The general point here is to focus supports on learners prior to their taking up employment. Achieving gains in self-esteem and self-confidence contributes to employability. It is also worth pointing out that older people are not immune from job-loss and many older people do wish to continue to work in later life.

Empowering the adult returning to education

Carey (2012) describes her experience as a learner who started in community education and progressed to achieving a major award and employment. Patricia's story is illustrative of the positive impacts being achieved from that first step into community education. Patricia had negative experiences in her prior secondary education. One teacher had commented that she 'would amount to nothing' (p. 27). A community education computer class was provided locally in a block of flats in a converted premises. Being locally-based this was a major benefit for the community. At the suggestion of Dun Laoghaire VEC Community Education Service, Patricia progressed through BTEI accredited courses to achieving awards at levels 3, 4 and 5 and gained work with the Irish Wheelchair Association. Not only that, the impact of her learning

encouraged her sister and mother to return to learning as well. She also passes on her learning as a mentor supporting other learners with their assignments. Community education therefore has an important facilitative role which enables participants to progress to further education and ultimately the workplace.

Practice example: A clear line of sight to work

Further to Williams' article (2013) reviewed earlier on the Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning's report '*It's about work: Excellent adult vocational teaching and learning*', a number of supplementary papers (CAVTL, 2013b) provide evidence of good practice in courses leading to employability outcomes. Two examples under the 'clear line of sight to work' criteria expressed by the commission are worth mentioning for their relevance to adult community education. First, a photography tutor explains:

> Some pursue photography as a career…but a lot of students would actually be doing the course for personal development and their own interests…maybe it's not realistic to think about working as a photographer as a full time job, so you might end up doing wedding photography but you have another job that you do…part of the week.
>
> (CAVTL, 2013b, p. 9)

Secondly, a construction tutor emphasises that it is important to know many adult learners 'may have had difficult employment experiences' in the past:

> For a lot of my students it's the first time that they've had…someone actually pat them on the back and say 'good job'. It (the course) gives them self-esteem; it gives them a bit of routine; it gives them some achievement, it actually puts them back on the map, if you like, and accepted by people.
>
> (CAVTL, 2013b, p. 9)

Again the role of the community education tutor who has empathy and understanding of where participants are coming from is a vital element of what makes community education work.

Active and Politicized Citizens

Having already considered policy and research on active citizenship, we now turn to practice. Under the Lisbon Convention, active citizenship and employability were accorded equal importance as goals of the European Union. In the context of the economic downturn in Ireland, there would seem to be greater emphasis placed in government policy documents on employability. Given the close alignment of the aims of active citizenship with those of community education, the question arises if active citizenship actually contributes to employability and vice versa. Apart from the contribution made by volunteering which was identified earlier, some further answers may lie in practice.

Where to now for active citizenship in Ireland?

What lessons can community educators take from the state's objectives for active citizenship on the one hand (STAC, 2007; 2008), and critical commentary on these ideas on the other? (Gaynor, 2011). An example from practice demonstrates some positive possibilities. The Limerick Community Education Network, Limerick City Adult Education Services and Limerick Regeneration Agencies produced a research study (2011) on the social value of community-based adult education. One of the findings related to active citizenship (p. 52). Learners demonstrated increased confidence in being able to participate at a political level through 'voting in the recent election' and 'lobbying' for maintenance of local community education (p. 52).

Community education can certainly contribute to re-inserting political consciousness and 'conscientisation' (Freire, 1970) into active citizenship through its educational work in disadvantaged communities. There is less research on the direct benefits accruing to employability as a result of active citizenship. This is another avenue which requires specifically focused research.

Volunteering and informal learning in Canada

Mündel and Schugurensky (2008) draw on their Canadian experience to document the informal learning achieved by adults resulting from volunteering in community organisations in Canada. Their account describes three kinds of learning; instrumental skills, learning to work with others, and learning about the role volunteering in society (p. 50). Their research involved two case studies of volunteer organisations, one a group of housing cooperative committees and the other a variety of community-based organisations. Findings are drawn from interviews with 82 volunteers.

Volunteers named their instrumental learning achievements variously, as; 'how to prepare budgets', learning about 'legislation on eviction or pollution', learning to work with office equipment and 'computers' and 'managerial skills' (pp. 52-53).

Learning to work with others was evidenced by volunteers developing their 'people skills', 'knowledge of decision-making', 'openness toward people with diverse ideas and backgrounds' (p. 53). The findings also refer to;

> Non-formal educational activities, such as workshops and conferences, that offered volunteers important learning opportunities.
>
> (Mündel & Schugurensky, 2008, p. 53)

Much of the learning experienced was unplanned and 'incidental' (p. 54). Volunteering with others also helped individual volunteers to 'disconfirm their own prejudices and challenge their stereotypes' (p. 54).

Learning about the role of volunteering and its role within society indicated more than incidental learning, but rather a more explicit form of learning achieved by reflection and evaluation of the volunteering experience (p. 55). The raising of political consciousness about an issue such as the right to housing, is gained through a 'series of deliberately educational activities' (p. 56) allied to the volunteering.

> Most of the volunteers could articulate their learning relative to making changes in their co-op but far fewer could articulate how to make changes to policy at the municipal, provincial or federal level.
>
> (Mündel & Schugurensky, 2008, p. 56)

The Canadian article concludes with recommendations which call firstly, to make learning explicit through sharing experiences, secondly, by providing spaces such as workshops to do this, and thirdly, to set up mentoring systems between experienced and new volunteers (p. 58).

Non-formal and Informal Learners

Identifying and valuing non-formal and informal learning

Smith (2013) reports on her involvement as a member of Knockanrawley Resource Centre in a Grundtvig project aimed at producing 'innovative training modules for practitioners' in the whole area of non-formal and informal learning 'in their communities' (p. 6). Knockanrawley focused on peer mentoring and developed a DVD and workbook containing guidelines for practitioners to use with groups for the purpose of identifying and validating their non-formal and informal learning. 62 learners and 9 tutors in the Knockanrawley Resource Centre gave 'very positive' feedback about the learning tools which motivated them to 'learn more in their lives and validate it' (p. 7).

The development of practical tools to help people identify the outcomes of informal and non-formal learning is a good example of policy implementation in this area. The recognition of non-formal and informal learning, so much a feature of community education provision is taken seriously at EU level as we have seen. Systems for its recognition are encouraged. EU policy calls on member states to 'have in place, no later than 2018…arrangements for the validation of non-formal and informal learning' (Council, 2012, p. 3). In Ireland where there is at least an emerging validation system (Colardyn & Bjornavold, 2004, p. 72), this system equates to the British model of accreditation of prior learning, APL (p. 72). Coughlan (2010) reaffirms this in his EU inventory report on Ireland:

> The term ‘recognition of non-formal and informal learning (RNFIL)’ is not widely used in Ireland and is usually taken to be included in the wider term ‘recognition of prior learning (RPL)’.
>
> (Coughlan, 2010, p. 1)

Clearly EU policy is moving toward established systems to recognise informal and non-formal learning given its important contribution to social and economic development in the Europe. Ireland may need to take a leaf out of the EU book in this area.

Recognition of non-formal and informal learning: A practice perspective

Jackson and Whitwell (2011) draw on a small scale research study in a local authority community education setting to explain why non-accredited learning in an informal setting is to be valued. They share a contemporary writer’s fear of going down the road of a ‘certified rather than a learning society’ (Marks, 2000 cited in Jackson & Whitwell, 2001, p. 129). The research setting in Yorkshire is affected by rural and urban deprivation. The sample included 87 non-accredited art courses and 9 accredited art courses. Two students from each course were randomly selected and sent questionnaires. A 60% response rate was recorded. 25 one to one interviews were undertaken lasting 45mins each. The findings from questionnaires and interviews point to the value derived from participation in non-accredited learning. These include:

a. The majority of participants had not progressed beyond minimum school leaving age (16 yrs).
b. Respondents had attended other classes apart from art, e.g. yoga, line dancing, information technology and French.
c. The most frequently cited reason for uptake of their chosen course was ‘to increase their skill or knowledge’ (p. 134).
d. Many undertook the course because they had time to do so because ‘children had left home’ or ‘retirement’.
e. Art participants were ‘very aware of the social nature of the classes’ (p. 135). We have seen this in the context of social capital (Putnam, 2000) in that forming networks is a key benefit facilitated by community education.
f. Asked whether accreditation would have affected their choice of course, there was a mixed response, some associating accreditation with ‘pressure’ and ‘restriction’ (p. 136).

The experience of participants from a number of practice settings in this Yorkshire study further affirms the value of non-accredited community-based learning. The findings bear similarities to the testimonies of participants at the AONTAS Adult Learners’ Festival event described earlier (AONTAS, 2013).

Social and economic benefits of informal community education

Tett (2010, pp. 60-65) provides a good practice example of community education as radical empowerment. A course on ‘Health Issues in the Community’ involving people throughout Scotland was developed to address structural inequalities in health:

> In Scotland life expectancy for those born in 2001 was predicted to be 74.6 years for men and 79.8 for women in the more affluent areas compared to 69.2 for men and 76.5 for women in the least affluent areas.
>
> (MacIntyre, 2007 cited in Tett, 2010, p. 60)

The course which is locally based enabled people to come together to 'build a curriculum' (p. 61) around their health issues. By bringing people together in a collective community education process, 'private' health issues were unmasked to reveal a 'public' dimension (Jones, 1999b, cited in Tett, 2010, p. 62). The view that most health problems are contributed to by structural factors such as 'poverty, unemployment, pollution, poor housing and power imbalances' is supported by research (p. 61). Clearly better off people with higher incomes can access and afford health services more easily. Taking poor housing as an example, one group who participated in the course gained the confidence to successfully campaign collectively for 'better insulation, cladding, soundproofing and heating for their houses' (p. 62). Another group focused on healthy diet and affordability of healthy foods. The high costs of fresh fruit and vegetables in the town shopping centre were prohibitive for poor families, so they decided to buy directly from a local farmer and sell them in the community at a cheaper price. They also produced information leaflets on health eating (p. 63). These examples illustrate the radical approach to community education; curriculum design to meet the expressed needs of the community leading to awareness raising and collective action for social change.

Whilst Tett does not deal here with the economic dividend of this community education intervention, there are now tools discussed earlier which can be used to demonstrate this value, for example, the New Economics Foundation's *Social Return on Investment* model (Cabinet Office & Office of the Third Sector (UK), 2009). In monetary terms, the modest cost of the community education course could be measured against savings in expenditure on public health treatment. The surplus savings represent a dividend for the state. Furthermore, while there is no explicit intent here to demonstrate employability impact of such courses, nevertheless there is potential employability enhancement through participation in the courses. Elsewhere, primary health care in the community has employed local people to promote health education and information in their local communities thus preventing health problems. As already referred to, an example in Ireland is the primary health care initiative involving the Traveller community and the Health Service Executive (Pavee Point, 2005).

Conclusion

The sample of practice examples drawn upon for this part of the literature review sought to provide evidence of the employability, labour market preparedness and active citizenship

benefits gained from participation in community education. The sample covers a range of practice in Ireland, the UK and internationally. The sector would benefit from the publication of more practice case studies and a research hub would certainly contribute in this regard.

5. CONCLUSION

This literature review has sought to assemble a range of policy, research and practice papers from EU, International, UK and Irish sources, which address the question *In what ways does community education meet the labour activation and employability challenge of the current unemployment crisis in Ireland?* A number of conclusions emerge from the literature.

Policy

At the level of policy, it is clear that there is strong recognition at EU level for the contribution which non-formal and informal learning makes to participants' employability and labour market readiness as well as their involvement as active citizens in shaping the social Europe. Irish policymakers are somewhat behind the curve compared to the EU when it comes to recognising and valuing informal and non-formal learning such as community education. This is reflected in the fact that 'Ireland lags considerably behind leading countries in LLL participation rates' (Cedefop, 2013c, p. 3). The statistics presented in this review support this argument. However, there are signs that Ireland is embracing the EU agenda of lifelong learning. The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (2007, p. 99) recognised the need to engage higher numbers of adults in lifelong learning.

It is against the backdrop of an unemployment crisis in Ireland and labour market activation policies that the community education sector seeks to maintain the space ascribed to it in *Learning for Life* the White Paper on Adult Education (DES, 2000). The dual meaning of community education as both an extension of education into the community and individual and collective empowerment for social change, gives it focus and flexibility. In terms of policy, the Community Education Facilitators Association, the Department of Education and Skills, and AONTAS have stated policy positions on community education which reflect this meaning. Community education is described as 'a continuum of personal development, community development, social analysis and political participation' (CEFA, 2011, p. ii). It is focused on meeting the needs of marginalised groups and communities and therefore forms part of social justice work and aligns closely with community development. It is a participative and collective educative process.

In seeking to stay true to its mission defined in policy, community education as a sector must also pay heed to current reality. In Ireland that reality is recession and unemployment, though there are signs of recovery. In the midst of the current economic crisis, governments across Europe including Ireland could make the mistake of reducing education down to a purely economic purpose, jobs-driven focus. European lifelong learning policy and Irish lifelong learning policy would suggest such a choice would be a mistake. Community education is not

anti-jobs. If anything community education is actually quite effective in supporting people to grow in confidence and self-esteem and gain skills which support their access to the labour market in the future.

Research

In a time of budgetary constraints across the EU and in Ireland, it is usual to give a higher priority to frontline services over research. Yet in other sectors of the economy, research and development (R&D) is an economy in itself. This literature review has attempted to assemble research which points to the positive impacts which community education makes as the first building block for disadvantaged adult learners to engage with the labour market.

The research papers considered here from Cedefop at EU level, NIACE at UK level and AONTAS in the Irish context among others, cover important avenues of enquiry. These include; recognition of non-formal and informal learning, measuring the wider benefits of lifelong learning, research on employability and active citizenship. These research papers trace the positive impacts which non-formal and informal learning including community education hold for participants accessing the labour market.

Specific research still needs to be done. In particular there is a need to document good practice in the field of community education, particularly in relation to employability, labour market activation and active citizenship. Whether we accept or resist the box-ticking in education and training, the demand for evidence of the impacts of interventions such as community education is unlikely to dissipate. Some of the tools being developed by the sector, such as social return on investment *(sroi),* are illuminating the wider benefits of non-formal and informal learning. The community education sector requires dedicated resources to strengthen its research capacity in Ireland on a par with other sectors of the education system here.

Practice

Policy and research affirms that not only formal education but also non-formal and informal learning taking place in local communities has an important place on the education landscape. The evidence from practice demonstrates this also. The connections between social exclusion and labour market vulnerability are clearly linked. The issues of low self-esteem and lack of self-confidence are clear barriers to people from disadvantaged groups and communities entering the labour market. On the other side, the INOU conference report (2012) noted that employers ‘have not traditionally regarded the public employment service as their first choice as a source from which to recruit staff’ (p. 29). The NESF study (2006) also referred to ‘discrimination and prejudice’ on the part of employers and this must be challenged as well. The unemployed will play their part by enrolling on courses. Employers need to play their part too

by providing meaningful jobs. There are many incentives now for employers to create jobs, including JobsPlus (Department of Social Protection, 2013b).

Community education has a clear set of principles and practices which are effective in addressing the barriers experienced by participants. The first steps for disadvantaged learners in returning to learning and engaging with the world of work are often first taken in local community education centres. It is if anything, an important stepping stone in the continuum of education and training. The small sample of practice studies presented here demonstrate the effectiveness of community education in supporting people with re-entry to the labour force in very practical and meaningful ways. As stated above, there is a need for more research and recording of these important lessons. What is presented here is but a sample of the ordinary yet vibrant changes which community education facilitators, tutors, community workers, trainers and learners are collectively achieving in their work on the ground. These narrative accounts make concrete the lines of policy and research.

In conclusion this literature review has attempted to assemble in one place the current policy, research and practice snapshots of community education as it relates to the ongoing crisis of jobless communities in 2013 Ireland. Like other sectors, the community education sector is adapting to the challenge posed by current labour market activation policy and the employability agenda dominating education and training at this time. At the same time, the sector retains its commitment to a core ethos which seeks deeper structural change to a more sustainable economy and society informed by the values of community solidarity, equality and justice. Such a vision, if allowed to flourish, may create a world of work, end labour market exclusion and empower citizens.

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