Developing a Strategy for Adult and Community Education Provision in North East Inner City Dublin

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Executive Summary

The North East Inner City (NEIC) has an estimated population of c46,000. In recent years, its population has increased by around 20 percent. This has included a merger of a historically established working-class and a rising young professional population, many of whom have settled in the area because of the NEIC's proximity to the Irish Financial Services Centre. There is also a growing migrant population. Although there is much to celebrate about this heterogeneity population, there are also significant pockets of financial poverty when measured against national deprivation markers. According to census figures of 2016, there are higher than average numbers of lone-parent families, stubbornly high levels of unemployment and higher than average early school leaving. There is also lower than average progression to tertiary education, a factor known to impact a person's earning capacity and quality of work. Consistent with European trends, the NEIC also has an ageing population with the proportion of people living over 80 years expected to double in the next forty years.[1] Factors such as financial poverty, generational educational disadvantage, family status, minority ethnicity, perilous citizenship, and/or disability are not independent but rather are intersectional. Socio-economic deprivation of this nature frequently results in high levels of substance misuse and, since the 1990s, the NEIC has experienced stubbornly high demand for drugs.

The NEIC also has a rich community-based network of adult education providers dating back to the 1970s who have for many years, sought to respond to the education, training and developmental needs of those most impacted by the demographics described thus far.

The Purpose of this Research

This research and resultant strategic plan satisfies objective 3.2 of the *Social and Economic Regeneration of Dublin's North East Inner City (NEIC) 2020-2022 Strategic Plan* which is to 'Develop and agree a strategy on community education with the relevant stakeholders'. The research aims are,

1. To give an overview of current adult and community education provision in the NEIC.
2. To identify current coverage, reach, referral, coordination and collaboration across providers.
3. To identify gaps, and also duplication, in provision.
4. To give an overview and analysis of the demographics for adult age groups in the NEIC.
5. To produce a strategy for Adult and Community Education in Dublin's North East Inner City.

The research is funded by the CDETB and the North East Inner City Task Force.

This study is underpinned by a 'Freirean' influenced, values-based approach to community education that is characterised by high levels of participation that seeks both individual and collective benefit with an emphasis on active citizenship. In recent years there has been a growing understanding of the need to infuse sustainable development into this work in line with current government commitments to the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

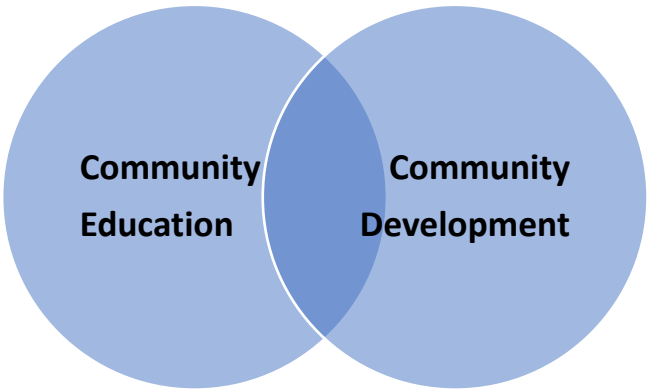
Consulting the Community

We consulted with three distinct cohorts:

- Three hundred and sixty local residents across a range of ages and genders (13 percent of who were migrants) completed an online anonymous survey that inquired into their knowledge and understanding of local adult and community education, motivations for learning, and barriers that prevent them getting involved.
- Twenty-eight existing learners across a range of programmes. These adult learners participated across five focus-groups.
- Eighteen adult and community education providers and other stakeholders. These research participants participated across one-to-one interviews and focus groups.

The Policy Context

Ireland has a rich history of participatory, democratic, dialogic community education where a core feature of its work is both personal and political development. There is often cross-over with community education and community development (as illustrated below).



Values based community education occupies the overlap. Community-based education outside of this overlap is typically characterised by a universal model of adult education which Fitzsimons (2017, p. 54) describes as a consensus or conservative approach that is based on a homogenous, apolitical view of society. Community development outside of the overlap refers to processes such as policy interventions and participation in social partnership processes that does not involve convening adult learning groups.

Ireland's current Further Education and Training (FET) Strategy, *Future FET: Transforming Learning* (2020) acknowledges a role for community education describing it as 'a critical part of provision' and as something characterised by 'ground-up initiatives developed to service the needs of particular localities, often in partnership with local organisations'.[2]

The 2021 ten-year policy *The Adult Literacy for Learning Strategy* promotes a 'cross-Government, cross-economy and cross-society approach that can help create a more equal, inclusive Ireland for all where everyone feels they can participate and belong'.[3] *The Adult Literacy for Learning Strategy* (2021) specifically names community education providers, and also 'ETB FET learning facilities' as central to the strategy and encourages joined-up thinking across these and other support agencies including local development companies, libraries, citizens information centres and a growing network of digital hubs.

The *National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-2019* (extended in the context of the coronavirus) seeks to increase participation in higher education for non-

traditional groups including 'entrants from socio-economic groups that have low levels of participation in HE', 'first time, mature students' and 'further education award holders' and other population groups who are underrepresented in universities including Irish Travellers, mature students and disabled people.

Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities (2019-2024) reasserted a values-based approach to community development naming these as active participation, empowering communities, collectivity, social justice, sustainable development, human rights, equality and anti-discrimination. Its main focus is to support community development in incorporating the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and working at local, national and international level to address climate change.[4]

In 2020, and in response to the coronavirus pandemic, SOLAS introduced the *Mitigating Against Educational Disadvantage Fund* (MAEDF) which is in situ to provide extra funding to support educationally disadvantaged learners so they might better access community education.

Networking and Supports across Community Education Providers

There are two significant national community education networks; the AONTAS Community Education Network (CEN) and the Community Education Facilitator's Association (CEFA). Practitioners from the NEIC participate within both structures. There are also other regional networks, for example, the Limerick Community Education Network and the Donegal Community Education Forum. Both draw membership from across public (ETB) and independent provision and both have recently produced strategies for their future work. These are presented in the main report as models of good practice.

Local Provision of Adult and Community Education

The largest funder and provider of adult education in the NEIC is the City of Dublin Education and Training Board (CDETB).[5] Adult and community education delivery across the NEIC is organised around particular posts of responsibility namely an Adult Education Organiser (AEO), the Adult Education Guidance Initiative, an Adult Literacy Organiser (ALO) and a Community Education Facilitator (CEF).

The CDETB's Adult Education Service (AES) is based in Parnell Square and is both a funder and provider of accredited and non-accredited education programmes. Other main providers are:

- Dublin Adult Learning Centre (DALC)
- The Larkin Centre
- Lourdes Youth and Community Services (LYCS)
- Henrietta Adult and Community Education Service (HACE)
- Hill Street Family Resource Centre
- North Wall Community Development Project
- Ozanam House
- The SAOL project
- Swan Youth Services
- The Pathways Centre
- The Community After Schools Project (CASPr)
- The Irish National Organisation for the Unemployed

There are other providers also including the trade union SIPTU who offer ESOL classes for its members. Moreover, Shine, an organisation supporting people experiencing mental ill health receive some funding from the CDETB to delivering education programmes with participants referred by the health service. As part of the regeneration of the NEIC, an Intercultural Ambassador Programme was rolled out in 2021 and a Community Arts Programme commenced in 2021.

Although some groups receive core funding from one principal source, many others manage multiple funding streams and therefore manage a number of administrative systems. This can create an undue burden on providers.

The Adult and Community Education Forum

In 2017 research was undertaken by the CDETB AES in collaboration with local providers that assessed the effectiveness of adult and community education funded by the ETB. A key finding of the resulting *From Patchwork to Network* (Farrelly, 2017) was the need for greater collaboration across providers. As a result, The Adult and Community Education (ACE) Forum was established. The Forum meets monthly and has identified its core functions as to enhance communication, planning, progression, and to plan joint events and training across providers.[6]

Further Education and Higher Education proximal to the NEIC

In March 2022, it was announced that Cathal Brugha Street College (previously part of TU Dublin) will be developed as a Further Education provider. This facility will include a centralised admissions office, career guidance and learner information, an Apprenticeship, Traineeship and Employer Engagement Unit and a bespoke literacy and numeracy support unit. Another tertiary education provider proximal to NEIC is Marino College of Further Education who deliver a suite of QQI major awards at Levels 5 and 6 on the National Framework of Qualifications. There are also two higher education institutions both of which have access pathways into university programmes. These are the National College of Ireland (NCI) and Technological University (TU) Dublin. Local providers also have positive working relationships with other universities including Trinity College Dublin's Access office and some connections with Maynooth University.

The Benefits and Challenges of Adult and Community Education.

Five themes emerge from primary engagement with residents, existing learners and providers:

1. The transformative impacts of community-based education.
2. Ways in, and retention through, local providers.
3. The stated needs of residents.
4. The potential to reach more.
5. Progression pathways.

The Transformative impacts of community-based education

Overall, many people described the impact of community-based education as transformative and as a lifeline. People shared improvements in their capacity to read, write and use computers, their ability to communicate in the English language, improvements in their overall health and the capacity to secure work in an occupation they enjoyed. Social impacts included greater family communication and supports, a greater sense of community and a greater capacity to analyse society.

Significant challenges in measuring outcomes were identified particularly surrounding the current Programme Learner Support System (PLSS) which asks providers to measure

outcomes and performance from adult education programmes funded through ETBs. Challenges with measuring outcomes is not isolated to the NEIC. Other research commissioned by ETBI revealed similar concerns stating 'while PLSS has the capacity to capture some of Community Education's diverse benefits and outcomes … it is unable to provide a complete picture of Community Education's role and impact'.[7]

Ways in, and retention through, adult and community education

Some learners are referred through the CDETB Adult Education Guidance Initiative, or by other professionals, for example, public health nurses or school teachers. The majority self-refer and find out about courses through local advertising and word of mouth. A number of people are referred through the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP). This pathway is described as ad hoc and principally focused on labour market activation. This finding also mirrors previous commentary from the NEIC ACE Forum whose most recent briefing outlines how 'ideally, there should be a structured 'flow' of referrals as individuals come into contact with DEASP who can then be referred to a programme or course provider. Assessing a person's suitability for a programme could then be more collaborative between the Case Officer, CDETB Adult Education Service/Guidance Service and the programme provider'.[8]

The NEIC also has a Healthy Communities Project which is supported by the Health Service Executive (HSE). This initiative seeks to tackle health inequalities through social prescribing, in other words, by recognising the importance of non-medical supports in addressing aspects of a person's wellbeing.

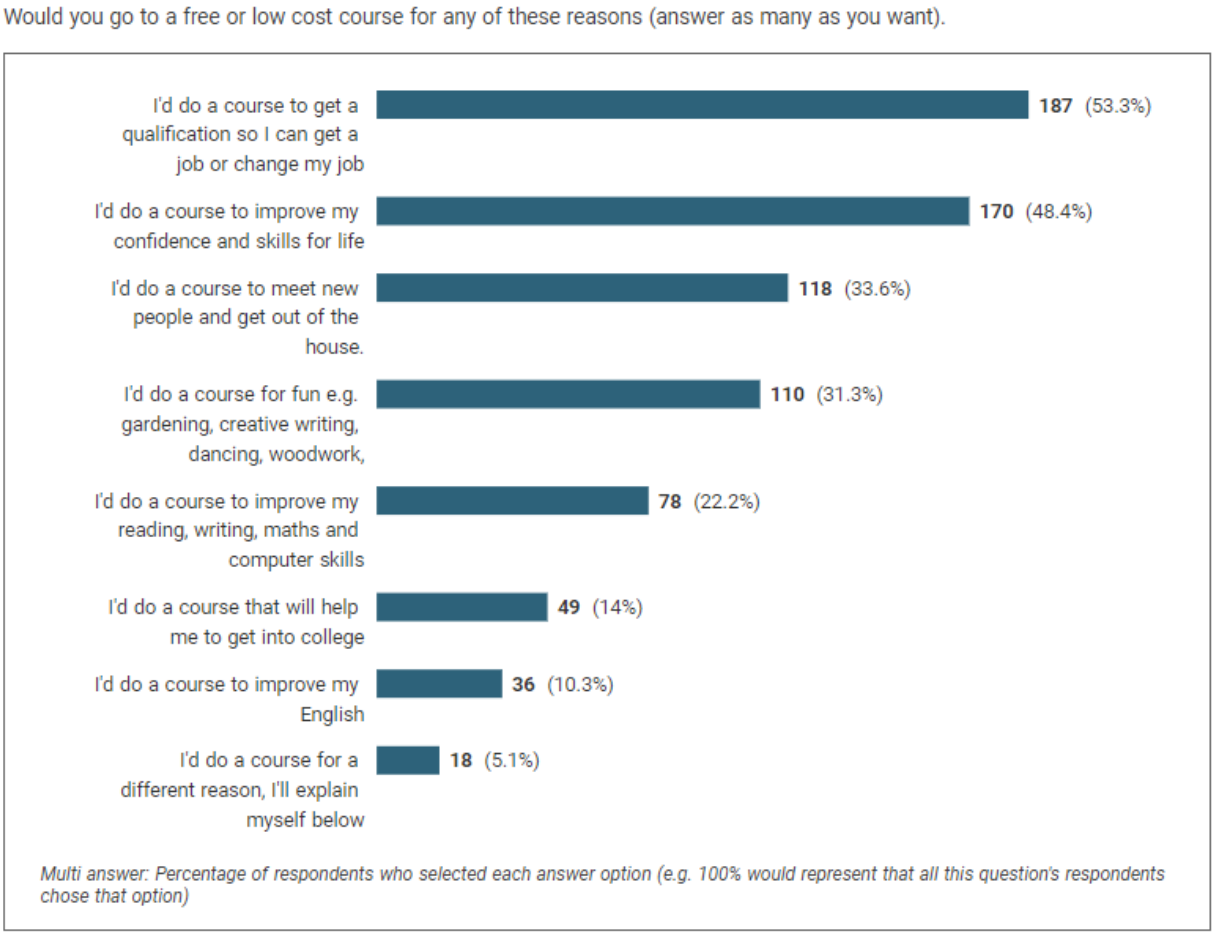
In terms of the reasons why a person stays involved, the strongest theme to emerge is the supportive atmosphere a person typically encounters. There are frequent and repeated references to the welcoming, hospitable spaces where there are high levels of respect and care. One man describes taking that first step in publicly acknowledging his struggles with reading and writing. He described 'the fear of walking in and seeing someone you know in the canteen' continuing,

> When I walked in here, I was thinking, she [the course coordinator] knows I can't read and write, and I was embarrassed. But then I was put at ease and realised there were other people who were in the same boat as I was in.

Providers understand the care that is required to support people in taking that first step, in fact a recurrent theme is to describe this initial engagement as one of the most important aspects of the work or, as this provider puts it, 'understanding that referring someone to an adult education course once a week could change their life'. They continue 'sometimes for people actually that little kind push can really work because once they get here, they really love it but it's getting them in the door'. Many talked about using introductory programmes, for example, in leisure and/or basic skills programmes (e.g., in English, maths and Irish) as ways to 'get them interested first, and then they may engage in wider learning'. Learners also welcomed the capacity to learn at their own pace, the option to learn online, affordability and proximity to home and schools.

The stated needs of residents

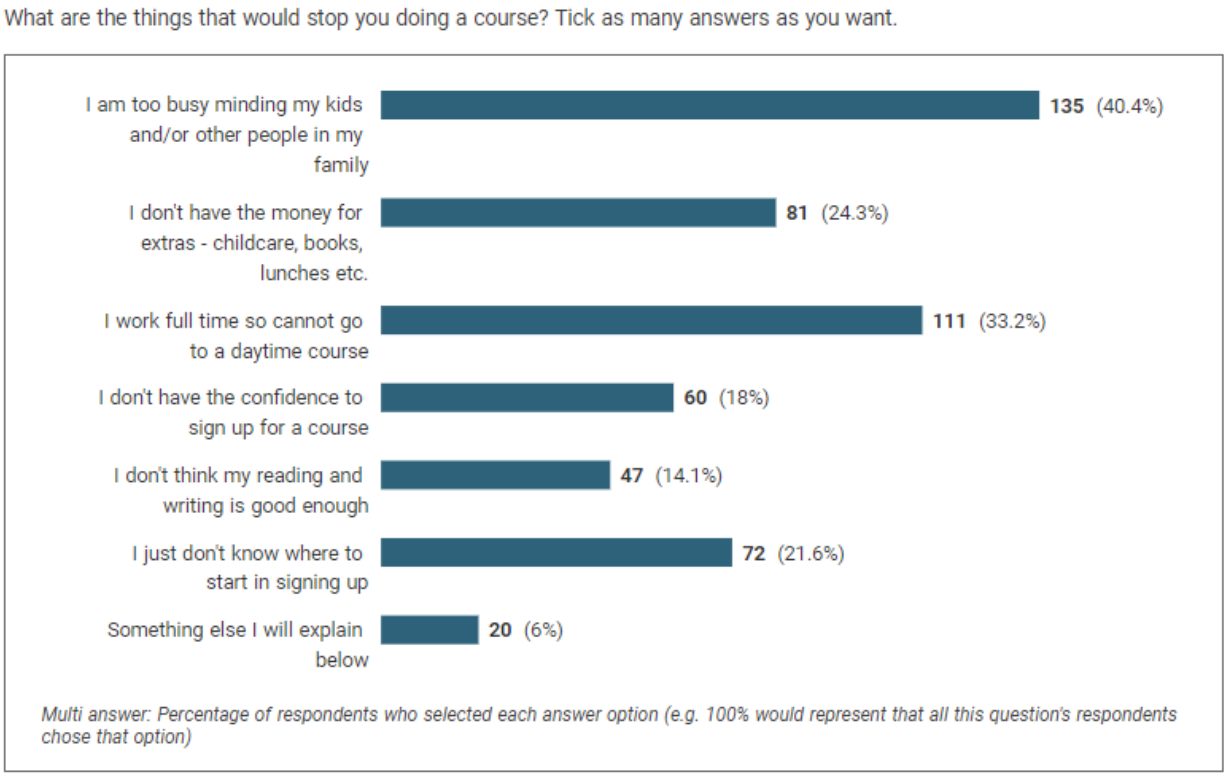
This study asked 360 residents to identify their own needs that might lead them to enroll in a local education programme.



Residents suggested particular courses that they would welcome. In summary these are:

- Health / Wellness / Personal Development (n15).
- Life Skills including cooking / driving / budgeting / parenting (n14).
- Languages / Culture / Drama / Art (n12).
- Literacy / Digital Literacy / Numeracy (n8).
- Career development / Job seeking skills (n5).
- Social studies / Law / Advocacy (n7).

There are also a range of structural barriers to participation as quantified below:



These structural barriers can feel overwhelming in terms of what providers can do. However, community educators can open debates particularly with policy makers about the impacts of economic inequality in determining equality in education.

Some structural barriers can be addressed. For example, where migrants are excluded because of a national failure to adequately recognise previous qualifications, some work has been done through a national practitioner led *Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) National Network* which is working towards providing a coherent practitioner voice in informing policy in this

regard including supporting good practice informed by national and international policy perspectives.

Another finding is how the funding model in situ limited some providers' options on what courses to run. This voice explains 'I can't ring up the ETB and say I need to put on classes for fathers, could we look at this'. The likely response they report is:

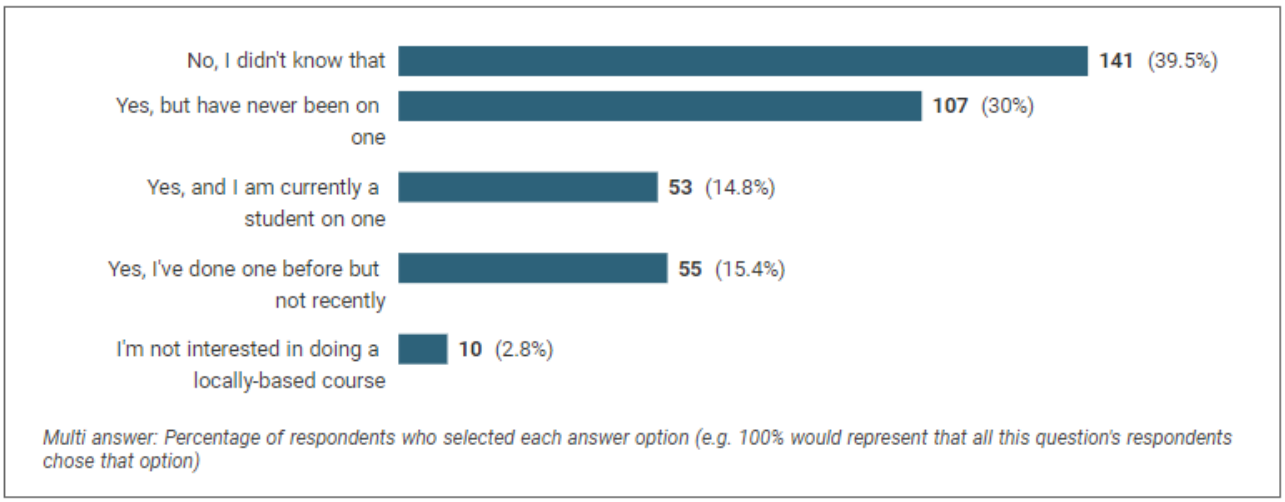
> 'Well we've got an art teacher and a computer teacher, guitar teacher', it's like, this is the menu. But that's not really community education it's a type education that I would describe as something slightly different.

Typically, these situations are created by the nature of contracts ETB tutors hold. This same problem was also identified in the 2017 *From Patchwork to Network* (2017) report which concluded restrictions on funding can negatively impact the work local education providers do.

The potential to reach more

Perhaps the biggest barrier to participation is whether or not people are aware of the courses that are on offer and as many as 39 percent were not aware of courses in the local area.

Do you know that there are free courses in your area? (for example in computers, local history, English, wellbeing).



Across each phase of the research, residents, learners and providers alike shared a sense that more could be done to advertise programmes. Concrete suggestions included more radio advertising, a greater social media presence, and a more structured strategy to encourage recruitment through word-of-mouth. Even when people knew about courses, some were unsure

how to get involved and were unaware of the extent of evening delivery. This gap in knowledge is despite the significant efforts made by organisations to let the community know about the courses that they offer through a range of methods including outreach, leafleting and poster campaigns, radio and social media advertising.

One clear recommendation is for greater outreach supports. This is raised in every practitioner focus group and in the majority of one-to-one interviews. Typically outreach seeks to achieve the following aims:

- To get accurate information to residents on existing supports and services.
- To consult with people in order to assess their needs and/or evaluate existing services.
- As a goal in its own right, for example, as mental health outreach and literacy outreach.

Creating an agreed understanding of community education.

For some providers, an agreed understanding of adult and community education that openly embraces a community development model is presented as one way to widen participation and there is a sense this can be achieved within the current policy context. This is dependent on access to some unrestricted funding that would allow projects to react to, as this provider puts it 'what's happening on the ground and that we need to respond to quickly' and work experimentally.

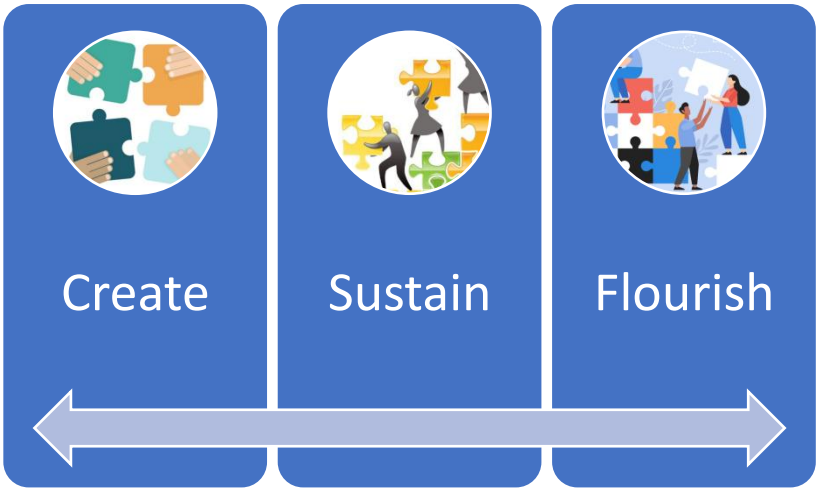
Progression pathways

Fourteen percent of residents identified the potential to progress from local education into college life as a motivating factor and there were reports on informal but relatively smooth progression onto accredited programme along the vertical national qualifications framework. There were also some reports of vocational progression and a secondary progression for the children of adult learners on their own educational journey. However, there is a sense that more work can be done in this space to create more defined pathways. There is also a sense that some changes are needed within Further Education to make it more inviting. For example, one provider comments on the terminology used nationally when naming major QQI awards which are given the title 'Post-Leaving Cert'. This, they rightly point out 'is exclusionary and people think it is not for them'.

A Strategy for Future Work

This strategy aims to support a greater understanding between funders and providers enabling all stakeholders to collaboratively iron out such concerns. A strategy must balance funder-led and community-led aspirations and must be cognisant of the consciousness raising ambitions of adult and community education as it responds to the complex needs of targeted residents in the NEIC. Education can increase people's awareness of climate-change, global inequality, the impact of borders on people's lives and the structural discrimination marginalised groups experience. This perspective can be in opposition to government discourse and a policy context that is, in the main, driven by European-led employability demands.

The Adult and Community Education (ACE) Forum is a significant outcome of the *From Patchwork to Network* action research initiative of 2016-2017. The next stage in ensuring an ongoing strategic approach is financial investment in sustaining and growing the existing structures.



The proposed strategy for future development therefore relies on financial and resource commitment by the City of Dublin Education and Training Board to sustain the ACE Forum so that, in the future, it can flourish. Their role (which may be part of a broader role) is to implement the following five goals.

GOAL 1: Expand the delivery of coordinated, community based education and guidance that supports personal, collective and civic need

GOAL 2: Develop a shared vision, values and core principles of Community Education as a tool to initiate policy change

GOAL 3: Advocate for social change in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals

GOAL 4: Raise awareness of provision and pathways amongst residents in the NEIC

GOAL 5: Raise the capacity of the Adult and Community Education Sector.

[1] Davies, 2014.
[2] SOLAS, 2020, p. 24.
[3] SOLAS, 2021, p. 33.
[4] Department of Rural and Community Development supported by the Cross Sectoral Group on Local and Community Development, 2019.
[5] The North Inner City is one of five regions across Dublin city provided for by the City of Dublin Education and Training Board (DCETB).
[6] City of Dublin ETB, 2018, p. 2-3.
[7] Dooley, 2021, p. 64.
[8] Ibid., p. 5.

Chapter 1. Introduction

The North East Inner City (NEIC) is an area of Dublin that stretches from Connolly railway station to Croke Park sports stadium. It borders parts of Dorset Street and O'Connell Street on the west and reaches to the edge of the East Wall. Its estimated population is c46,000. Much statistical and sociological analysis has been undertaken in this relatively small geographical area, an area one report describes as 'a place full of history and adventure, it has all the character that Dublin is so renowned for. It is the heart of James Joyce's Night Town chapter from Ulysses and its streets have seen the birth of the nation from all points of view'.[1] In recent years, the population of the NEIC has increased by around 20 percent. In particular, a historically established working-class population has been joined by young professionals, many of whom have settled in the area because of the NEIC's proximity to the Irish Financial Services Centre. There is also a growing number of people who have migrated from other countries and settled in Ireland. According to 2016 census figures, as many as 43 percent of residents in the NEIC were born outside of Ireland. In 2019, the ESRI measured 59 percent of residents of the Mountjoy Square area as born overseas, the highest concentration of migrants in any one geographical area in Ireland.[2]

In 2016, and in response to the impacts of serious crime in the area, the government comissioned Mr Kieran Mulvey (the former Director General of the Workplace Relations Commission) to investigate and report on the challenges facing the NEIC and to recommend specific measures to support long-term social and economic regeneration. The following year, the report *Dublin North East Inner City: Creating a Brighter Future* - which is commonly known as the *Mulvey Report*, was published. The *Mulvey Report* (2017) outlines an ambitious framework for social and economic regeneration for the NEIC with an initial three-year timeline towards a ten-year implementation. Four priority areas have been identified: tackling crime and drugs; creating an integrated system of social services; improving the physical landscape; and, of relevance to this study, maximising educational / training opportunities / creating local employment opportunities. The regeneration is being overseen by a Programme Implementation Board (PIB) which has representatives from Dublin City Council, An Garda Síochána, the Health Services Executive (HSE), government ministries of An Taoiseach, Health, Social Protection, Education, and Children and Youth Affairs and also some representatives from the business community. The initial *NEIC Strategic Plan 2020-2022* the

PIB currently oversees seeks to align services across government departments, community services, agencies and institutions. It commits to addressing barriers to educational progression, providing greater supports for enhancing employment opportunities and increasing uptake in adult education; all of which it hopes will reduce unemployment.[3]

1.1 A Diverse Population

There is much to celebrate about the aforementioned heterogeneity of the Dublin North Inner City's population. However, the area has significant pockets of financial poverty when measured against national deprivation markers.[4] The NEIC, in particular, has the highest deprivation scores when compared to other areas of the North Inner City.[5] According to 2016 census figures, 55 percent of families in the NEIC are single parent households and most of these are headed by a woman. The Covid19 pandemic saw a sharp increase in domestic care burdens for many of these families. Not unconnected, the NEIC has high numbers in receipt of social welfare payments. There are stubbornly high levels of unemployment, which at one stage measured three times the national average for men.[6] The 2016 census measured 19 percent of women and 24 percent of men as unemployed, both of which were well in excess of the national average of 13 percent.

One contributing factor in a person's capacity to secure decent work is the qualifications they hold. There is higher than average school drop-out in the NEIC. The 2016 census revealed as many as one in five only completing primary school. Although 93 percent of secondary school aged people are enrolled nationwide[7] this drops to 84 percent in DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity) schools,[8] a categorisation held by three of the four secondary schools in the NEIC. A person's retention in school has a direct impact on their literacy and numeracy capacities. In 2013, the *OECD Adult Skills Survey* measured one in six Irish adults with a literacy level of below 1 (on a 1-5 scale) and one in four adults scoring below 1 for numeracy meaning they are unable to understand basic written information.[9]

Progression to tertiary education is also lower than the national average. Higher Education Authority (HEA) figures on spatial and socio-economic profiles reveal less than half of the number of students reside in what the HEA describe as 'disadvantaged areas' when compared to those from 'affluent areas'.[10] In the NEIC, this gap can be pronounced. For example, census figures from 2016 indicate how, in Oriel Street Lower, just five percent progressed to third level education.

A person without a degree is significantly less likely to be working than those with a degree and are more likely to be working in low paid jobs.[11] People without qualifications are often at greater risk of uncertainty in an employment environment where there has been a broad casualisation of work across many occupational fields.[12] One recent study found significant growth in unstable working conditions in Ireland and an increase in precarious work including part-time work, under-employment, and temporary contracts.[13] These deteriorating working conditions have been linked to the growth of neoliberal policies, an economic and political model that transfers much economic risk and financial insecurity onto the shoulders of a now casualised, flexible workforce.[14] People working on casual, precarious contracts were disproportionately affected by the coronavirus pandemic[15] and higher levels of unemployment are anticipated for some time into the future especially for young workers.[16] Some communities also face significant discrimination when seeking employment. For example, recent research by McGinnity, Russell, Privalko & Enright (2021) found that the lowest rates of employment were amongst Ireland's indigenous Minceir (Irish Traveller) population measured as low as 11 percent.

These factors impact a person's capacity to earn a decent wage and low income earners face significant challenges in securing housing in a market that favours the private rental sector. Waiting lists for social housing are reportedly as long as ten years and the lack of affordable housing for young people have led to high levels of intergenerational living. Moreover, the NEIC has the highest rate of homelessness per capita with one emergency accommodation unit for every 57 residents.[17] It is also worth noting that a proportion of the population live in gated community settings which are not accessible in terms of outreach supports and which are often characterised by a transient population.

Some transience is within the NEIC's growing migrant community who often face a myriad of challenges. Whilst some likely fall into the category of young professional, the NEIC is home to many who experience higher than average levels of financial poverty and lower than average fluency with the English language.[18] Non-English speakers are consistently disadvantaged in a country where they must navigate a range of services that over-rely on the English language. One study of the NEIC carried out by Lourdes Youth and Community Services (LYCS) found low participation rates in local governance structures and the absence of an area-wide policy to support greater integration.[19] Migrants often experience barriers to civic engagement because they don't have the wider family supports many people take for granted.

There is also likely an unmeasured number of undocumented migrants, estimated at 17,000 nationwide, who have minimal legal protections and who frequently work in highly precarious jobs.

Despite these barriers, there is often a higher than average uptake by migrants in Further Education and Training (FET) including in community education. There has been some criticism of high numbers of migrants in FET captured by Joseph Ebun[20] who suggests that in the absence of robust national accreditation of prior learning pathways, this relationship can be an exercise in 'down-skilling' rather than 'up-skilling', preparing people for low-paid jobs that they are often overqualified for. Where refugees and asylum seekers access higher education, research by Sartori and Nwanze (2021) found many education providers don't understand the many challenges they face, in particular, the realities of living in Direct Provision and the financial restraints placed on them.

Consistent with European trends, the NEIC also has an ageing population with the proportion of people living over 80 years expected to double in the next forty years.[21] According to the charity Alone, there has been an increase in people over 65 years living in consistent poverty and unable to afford such basics as heating and clothes. It is therefore unsurprising that Niedzwiedz, et al. (2016) found greater numbers of older people are experiencing numerous health conditions.

Although the exact number of disabled people living in the area is unknown, figures sourced from the government's Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection measure 1,479 who are dependent on a disability allowance, 421 in receipt of a carer's allowance and 235 in receipt of an invalidity pension.

These multiple factors of financial poverty, generational educational disadvantage, family status, minority ethnicity, perilous citizenship, and/or disability are not independent of each other, rather, to quote Ross and Sollinger (2017, p. 75) 'they depend on each other, they feed on each other, and they gain strength from each other; they are integrative'. In other words, they are intersectional. Multiple oppressions also contribute to poor health.[22] Moreover, when a person seeks healthcare supports, Ireland's healthcare system is unequal, with austerity cuts disproportionately impacting those who are less well-off.[23]

Socio-economic deprivation of this nature frequently results in high levels of substance misuse and, since the 1990s, the NEIC has experienced stubbornly high demand for drugs, which in turn results in high levels of certain types of criminality and therefore a higher than average

number of residents who engage with probation services. Research by Sarah Meaney (2019) identified several barriers for former prisoners in accessing adult education including ongoing stigma, Garda vetting, low self-esteem and a sense of personal shame all of which influence a pattern of self-exclusion.

1.2 A Community Education Response

The NEIC has a rich community-based network of adult education providers who have for many years, sought to respond to the education, training and developmental needs of those most impacted by the demographics described thus far. Adult and community education is more than just courses, rather it is an approach that expressly seeks to nurture civic engagement and politicise people as part of a broader struggle for democracy and social justice.[24]

As part of this process, providers often adopt an alternative approach to education that emphasises group-work and participation and that rejects what Paulo Freire described as a 'banking approach to education' where the educator is seen as the most knowledgeable person in a room and where their role is to deposit knowledge into the minds of largely passive learners. Our school and college systems over-rely on rote-learning and persistently erase certain histories and identities, including the histories of communities such as the NEIC.[25] Because of its focus on terminal exams, certain 'multiple intelligences' are also often overlooked when these fall outside the parameters of behaviourist approaches.[26]

1.3 The Purpose of this Research

This study has been guided by the Adult and Community Education (ACE) Strategy Group which is made up of key providers in the area namely The Larkin Centre (est. 1996), Dublin Adult Learning Centre (DALC, est. 1974), Lourdes Youth and Community Services (LYCS, est. 1984) and the City of Dublin Education and Training Board Adult Education Service (CDETB AES) - a public service funded by the Irish government and the European Social Fund (ESF) as part of the ESF programme for inclusion, employment and learning. The ACE Strategy Group ensures the voice of adult and community educators is represented on the NEIC Programme Implementation Board (PIB), in particular on structures responsible for maximising education, training and employment opportunities. Members of ACE Strategy Group are on two of the six NEIC subgroups. Two are members of *Subgroup 2 Maximising*

education, training and employment opportunities which aims to increase adult education levels and decrease unemployment. One is a representative on Subgroup 6 Alignment of Services.

The ACE Strategy Group is also part of a wider *Adult and Community Education Forum* (ACEF) that creates a collaborative space for ETB funded education providers to support what are often referred to as 'hard to reach learners' in accessing appropriate, affordable education opportunities with confidence.

This research sets out a strategy for achieving this ambition. It is guided by the following specific objectives:

1. To give an overview of current adult and community education provision in the NEIC.
2. To identify current coverage, reach, referral, coordination and collaboration across providers.
3. To identify gaps, and also duplication, in provision.
4. To give an overview and analysis of the demographics for adult age groups in the NEIC.
5. To produce a strategy for Adult and Community Education in Dublin's North East Inner City.

Specifically, the research and strategic plan it supports satisfies objective 3.2 of the *Social and Economic Regeneration of Dublin's North East Inner City (NEIC) 2020-2022 Strategic Plan* which is to 'Develop and agree a strategy on community education with the relevant stakeholders.'

The research is funded by the CDETB and the North East Inner City Task Force.

1.3.1 A Values-based Approach

This research is underpinned by a values-based approach to community education as recently articulated by Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI) in 2021. They describe these as:

- *Lifelong learning*: through lives and careers.
- *Social Justice:* creating a just society for all citizens.
- *Active citizenship*: being involved in community.
- *Economic Prosperity*: valuing economic growth.

- *Inclusion:* the core philosophy of inclusion.
- *Intentionality:* intending to adopt and practice inclusion and Universal Design for Learning.
- *Appreciation:* of the value of a shared inclusive agenda.
- *Acceptance:* that practice is ever-changing and reactive to learners' needs.
- *Learner-Led:* entrusting learners to take ownership of their learning.
- *Partnership:* equal partnership with the community partners.[27]

This research adopts these values and assumes a definition of community education also provided by ETBI that it is:

- Located in communities which can be area-based or issue-based.
- Outside the formal education sector.
- Planned and delivered through a collaborative partnership with the community and voluntary sector.
- Learner-led, with learners deciding on content and learning methodology.
- Based on equality between the learner and tutor, with learners engaged as equal partners and mutual beneficiaries.
- Highly participative and primarily uses dialogical approaches, i.e. learning takes place through dialogue between learners and tutor.
- Focused on group learning, emphasising community cohesion, social justice and collective action.
- An opportunity for learners to participate in critical reflection for both the individual and the community.
- Aimed at fostering empowerment, contributing to civic society and developing skills.[28]

1.3.2 Incorporating Sustainable Development

'Education for Sustainability' The National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development in Ireland, 2014- 2020 identifies a clear role for community education (as part of the Further Education and Training sector) to contribute to sustainable development by providing learning opportunities 'for a cohort of learners who may have left mainstream education prematurely' and 'in developing the green economy'.[29] Specifically, a growing and important part of the work is to understand its relationship with the UN Sustainable

Development goals (SDGs). These 17 SDGs (see appendix 1) are a set of measures the Irish government has committed to achieving in order to advance social and ecological change.

There are many challenges to implementing these goals. Saolta, a government supported initiative that seeks to embed SDGs within adult and community education, notes that despite significant potential, 'there are concerns that much ACE activity has been driven by a skills agenda in recent decades, focusing primarily on upskilling or reskilling of workers for maintaining economic competitiveness in an increasingly globalised world'.[30] In the *Report On the 2nd Mapping of Global Citizenship Education in the Adult & Community Education Sector* (2022), Saolta identifies ongoing challenges in embedding SDGs in a meaningful and sustainable way and encourages providers to collaborate more so they can better align their practice with these global aspirations.

1.3.3 The Challenges of Measuring Community Education Outcomes

Values based adult and community education is often misunderstood particularly when it comes to tangibly capturing its many and varied outcomes. For an individual these can be as wide ranging as building a person's capacity to socialise, addressing loneliness, supporting work-readiness, developing new employment related skills, improving a person's health and wellbeing, and/or fostering the capacity to analyse the world around them. For a neighbourhood outcomes include building sustainable communities, supporting local politics, and/or improving the landscape of an area, for example, through community gardening.

Because these outcomes are often long-term, unpredictable and difficult to articulate they are difficult to quantifiably measure. Education and Training Boards Ireland are amongst those who recognise this, as do many of the providers who took part in this research. The people we spoke to often describe the work as slow and relational as it supports people to 'find a voice and build confidence' as one provider told us, or 'to become critical thinkers' as another asserts. To share one final example, another provider refers to 'the amount of incredible outcomes that come out of running a training course that are not necessarily connected to the original intention and that you could never have expected'. This theme, with additional findings will be discussed in more detail in section 4.1.3.

1.4 Consulting the Community

A core principle of the *Mulvey Report* is 'to engage with and involve local community and public representatives throughout the process' of regeneration.[31] In this research, community engagement was facilitated through consultation with three distinct cohorts.

1.4.1 The Voices of Local Residents

Firstly, and most centrally, we engaged with a broad spectrum of residents living in the North East Inner City via an online mixed-methods questionnaire (see appendix 2). The criteria for engagement were '*I am eighteen years or older and I live in the North East Inner City*'. A non-representative sample of 360 residents participated.[32] As figure 1 reveals, 70 percent of these contributors were born and raised in the NEIC, 12 percent were born and raised in another part of Ireland, while 13 percent were raised in other countries and moved to the NEIC.

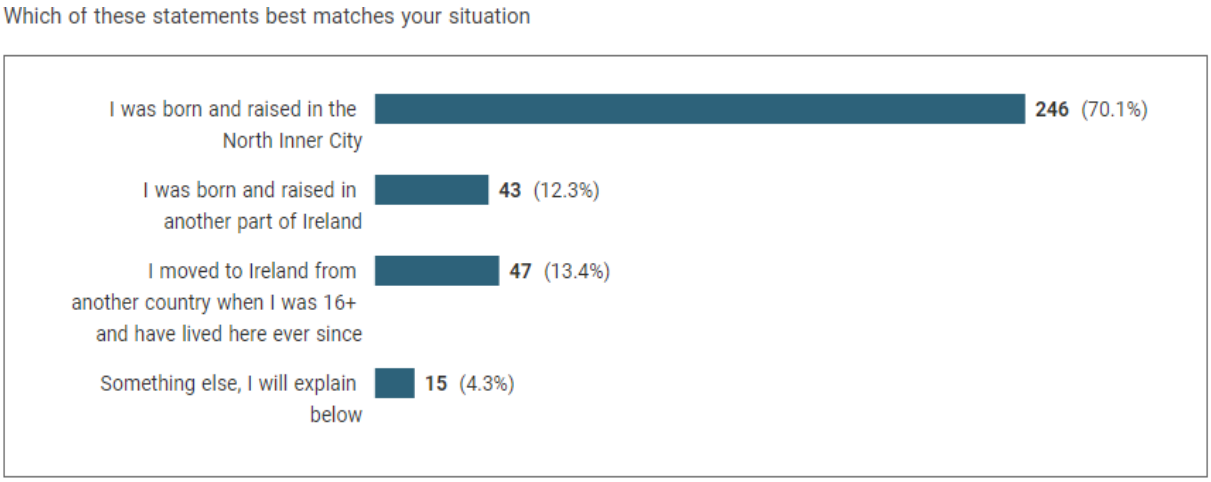


Figure 1 - Relationship to NEIC (97 percent response rate).

Seventy-four percent of participants are female, 26 percent are male and <1 percent identify as non-binary. Over half of the respondents were in the age range 31 to 45 years.

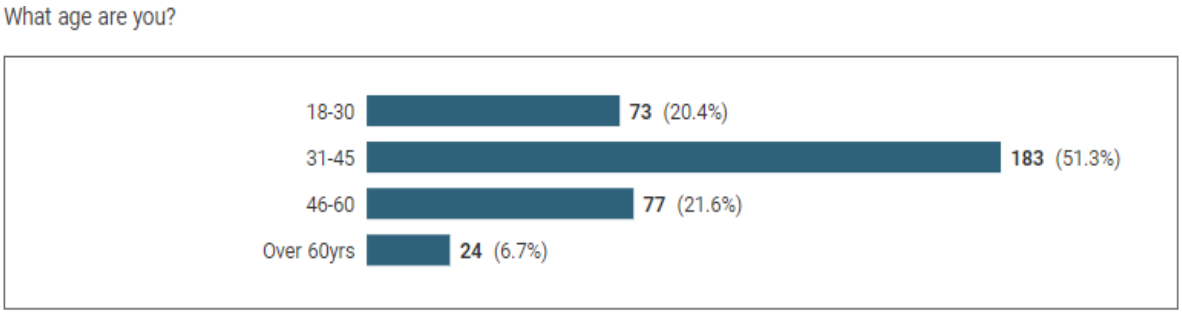


Figure 2 - Research participants age range (99 percent response rate).

1.4.2 The Insights of Existing Learners

Secondly, 28 adults (across all genders) already engaging in adult and community education participated in focus group discussions about their experiences on these courses, their sense of gaps in provision and their suggestions for change. This was through five focus-groups; two of which were face-to-face and three of which were online. Learners were drawn from a range of accredited and non-accredited programmes including mental health awareness, nutrition, special needs assistance, child psychology, community employment schemes, hair and beauty and yoga.

1.4.3 Education Providers and other Stakeholders

We also consulted with community education providers, tertiary education providers, representatives from homeless services, addiction supports, the local authority, prison services and representatives of migrants' groups. Nine people participated in focus groups, six people participated in one-to-one interviews and three participated in email interviews. These interviews centred around provider's perceptions of what is working well, what they believe could be managed better, what gaps they see, and what thoughts they have for a strategy to guide the work.

1.5 Research Strengths and Limitations

This research is dependent on a particular approach to strategic planning that draws from adult education methodologies of participation, inclusivity and dialogue. Its mixed-methods

approach draws evidence from both quantitative and qualitative methods integrating data from each into a combined analysis.[33]

The findings threaded through this report have been collated and analysed through a series of recursive and reflexive steps which were attentive to both the emerging themes within the data, and the externally defined research objectives.[34] The thematic analysis offered not only reports on numerical findings and repeated patterns but pays attention to the depth of feeling sometimes expressed and the things that are 'not said' along with what is said. The work has been grounded in ethical practices associated with human rights based, community development research which includes care and respect of all participants and an awareness of dimensions of power in research activities.[35]

All social research has limitations, and this study is no exception. Although there were high levels of engagement with the anonymous online survey, focus group participation fell short of our targets despite offering both online and face-to-face options. This applied both to learners' groups and to stakeholder groups where it was a challenge to get the levels of engagement we had hoped for. This was undoubtedly linked to the timing of the research and an unforeseen change in public health guidelines in response to the Covid19 pandemic. There are also limitations in terms of those who did participate. Just seven percent of participants were aged in the over 60 years population and just 26 percent of survey respondents identified as male. More research on these particular cohorts may be required in the future.

1.6 Outline of the Report

This introductory chapter contextualised this research and described our interpretation of community education; an expression we sometimes interchange with 'adult and community education', and 'community-based education'. It also detailed the aims of the research, the research design and its strengths and limitations. Chapter two outlines the policy context locating findings amidst a historical overview of community education and its relationship with the community and voluntary sector. Chapter three offers an overview of local provision today. Chapter four presents the bulk of findings from the field work described in section 1.4. Chapter five discusses the implications of these findings before presenting a strategy for developing the work of the Community Education Forum into the future.

[1] Mulvey, 2017, p. 8.
[2] Fahey, Russell, & McGinnity, 2019, p. 18.
[3] NEIC PIB, 2021, p. 12.
[4] The 2016 census shows Ferryman's crossing (population 251, deprivation score -21.18) has an age dependency ratio of 19 percent with high levels of dependents under 14 and over 65. Third level uptake was 8 percent, 44 percent had only completed primary level schooling. 80 percent are lone-parents and unemployment was 54 for men and 23 percent for women.
[5] Trutz Haase Social & Economic Consultant, 2019.
[6] Mulvey, 2017, p. 10.
[7] OECD, 2019.
[8] O'Brien, 2017.
[9] NALA, 2022.
[10] There are 4.9 students from disadvantaged areas to every 10 students from affluent areas, but this varies across institutions. Source: https://hea.ie/statistics/data-for-download-and-visualisations/socio-economic-data-and-maps/.
[11] McGinnity, Russell, Privalko, & Enright, 2021.
[12] Jaffe, 2021.
[13] Nugent, Pembrook, & Taft, 2019.
[14] Lopes & Dewan, 2015.
[15] Matilla-Santander, et al., 2021.
[16] Coates, Corcoran, Cronin, & Brioscú, 2020.
[17] Kilrane, 2020.
[18] Fahey, Russell , & McGinnity, 2019, p. 18
[19] LYCS, N.D.
[20] Ebun, 2020, p. 85.
[21] Davies, 2014.
[22] Pickett & Wilkinson, 2010.
[23] Flynn, 2014.
[24] Crowther et al. 2005: 1–2.
[25] Freire, 1972; hooks, 2004.
[26] Gardner, 2011.
[27] Dooley, 2021, p. 6.
[28] Ibid, p. 8.
[29] Department of Education and Skills, 2014, p. 19.
[30] Oberdorfer, Kearns, & O' Halloran, 2022.
[31] Mulvey, 2017, p. 6.
[32] The online anonymous survey questionnaire that was principally circulated via a WhatsApp message linked to 'online surveys' licenced to Maynooth University.
[33] Tashakkori & Teddie, 2010.
[34] Silverman, 2011.
[35] The research was conducted in the context of the Data Protection Act (1988, 2003), and in line with Maynooth University's Social Science Research Ethical Policies. Ethical approval was granted by Maynooth University's Ethics Committee in September 2021.

Chapter 2. Adult and Community Education: The Policy Context

Chapter 1 established that the North East Inner City (NEIC) of Dublin is a local authority area with an ageing population, high proportions of unemployment, low educational attainment, a higher than average number of lone parent households and a 'new Irish' population often living and working precariously. It also noted the NEIC's strong history in promoting local learning, and the researchers' understanding of community education as of personal and civic benefit to individuals, families and the wider community. This perspective is shared by many of the providers who contributed to this report.

As will be highlighted in chapter 3, the majority of community-based education is funded by the state and for this reason, it is important to frame any strategy for the future in the context of a history of the work of community educators (and the community and voluntary sector more broadly) and within a national policy context.

2.1 A Brief History of Adult and Community Education

Although a history of Irish adult and community education can be traced back as far as the 1600s,[1] a lot of what we are familiar with today began in the 1970s. In 1973, the first government commissioned Working Group on Adult Education (which was established from within AONTAS in 1969) published *Adult Education in Ireland*, or the *Murphy Report* as it is commonly known. The *Murphy Report* (1973) drew a direct correlation between economic disadvantage and educational attainment and the efforts of this working group are seen by many as instrumental in the appointment of Adult Education Officers (AEOs) within each of the 33 Vocational Education Committees nationwide (now merged into ETBs).

Outside of this public provision, a number of grassroots independent adult education providers emerged around the same time including the NEIC based Dublin Literacy Centre (since renamed the Dublin Adult Learning Centre) which opened its doors in 1974. The Dublin Literacy Centre had an express purpose of providing basic adult education to the local population and was part of a wider consciousness-raising literacy movement that was particularly influenced by similar community-based initiatives in the UK. The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) was established in 1980.

In 1984, a second government report called *Lifelong Learning: Report on the Commission on Adult Education* (1984), known as the *Kenny Report*, further developed local delivery by ring-

fencing budgets for adult literacy and community education for the first time. The *Kenny Report* led to the creation of the Vocational Training and Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) introduced in 1988 which remains a feature of community-based education today.

Simultaneous to this growth in adult education, a parallel grassroots community development / social justice movement was emerging across Ireland. In 1984, the NEIC based community development project Lourdes Youth and Community Services (LYCS) began operating with an ambition to 'attempt to combat the relentless economic and social decline being experienced' through 'education, training, recreation and development' that is 'concerned with giving participants the opportunity to become involved in their own development and the development of their community'.[2] Two years later (in 1986) The Larkin Centre was established to principally work with people who were unemployed. The Community Action Network (CAN) also came into being in the NEIC in the early 1980s.

These groups were amongst around c400 groups nationwide, including 107 Family Resource Centres (FRCs), that were funded through a series of grant-aid programmes beginning with money initially sourced through Ireland's membership of the European Union, then domestic funding through the Community Development Programme.[3] Much of this work was educational; in fact, research carried out by Nexus in 2002 found that most projects across different funding streams were 'involved, to a greater or lesser extent, in delivering training, educational or social awareness programmes within their own communities'.[4]

Although funded by the state, these projects were, by and large, autonomous in terms of day-to-day management. This Community and Voluntary Sector (CVS) addressed a complexity of needs that extended far beyond literacy and numeracy incorporating personal development, social and political awareness, youth services and supports, disability services and addiction supports. There was also an emphasis on gender equality though a range of locally managed women's groups including the North Wall Women's Centre, which was opened in 1985. These groups created a sanctuary for many women through relaxed, relational environments that validated their experiences of womanhood in a world shaped by patriarchal structures.[5] There were also bespoke supports for men. An evaluation report by The Larkin Centre found a range of benefits from their Men's Health and Wellbeing Programme including supports for isolation where they have left the family home and/or lost custody of children, something that research has found can contribute to a deterioration in mental and physical health.[6]

The CVS in the North Inner City were particularly mobile on the need to support those impacted by drug misuse. In 1982 the Ana Liffey Drugs Project opened its doors. Some years later and following a city centre mass meeting of activists and local representatives, Citywide (est. 1995) was created; a campaign and network organisation committed to the principles of community development.[7] The Saol Project, an education and support programme for women in addiction rehabilitation, took its first intake in 1995, one year before a significant injection of funding into the sector because of the *Ministerial Task Force on Measures to decrease the demand for drugs* (1996). Citywide, entered the Community Development Support Programme in 1997.

As a collective, this CVS (sometimes called the Community Sector) sought to influence social change based on repeated analyses that certain communities, including the NEIC, were disproportionally disadvantaged because of consistent failures by the state to provide adequate housing, welfare, transport, and other social supports. This 'in and against the state' positioning created some tensions for the sector in term of its relationship with its funder. Many believe their consistent critique, along with the challenges of measuring complex and multi-layered outcomes (as described in section 1.3.3) contributed to its substantial downsizing which began in 2008 through a series of forced mergers, and closures that eroded much of its autonomy.[8] Part of this restructuring culminated in closure of Community Development Projects as independent entities and the ultimate creation of the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (or SICAP). The role of SICAP is to target resources at individuals and communities that are most at risk of economic and social exclusion.

2.1.1. The Relationship between Community Education and Community Development

There has been much discussion about the relationship between 'community education' and 'community development' and there is no one way to articulate this. There is much overlap and common ground across the concepts particularly where community education is understood as a process of collective engagement that leads to communal outcomes. One differentiation is where community development supports active citizenship in other ways such as through direct engagement in local governance structures or where significant work is expended on needs analysis.

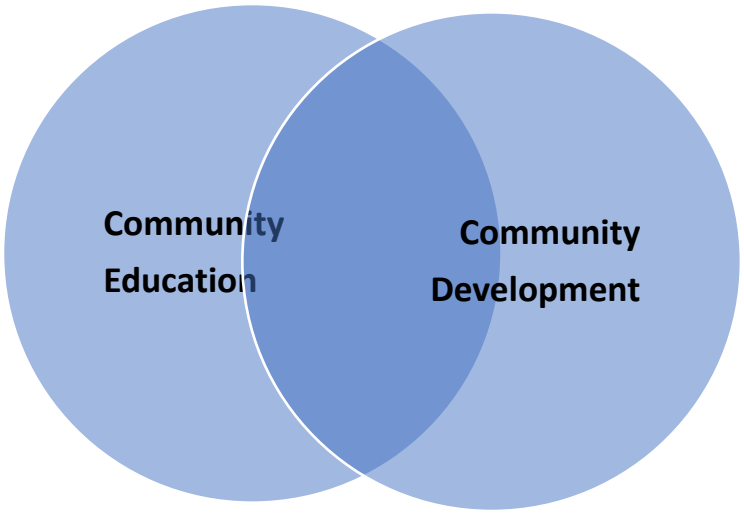


Figure 3 - Relationship between Community Education and Community Development

Figure 3 illustrates this relationship with values-based adult and community education typically happening in the overlap. Community-based education outside of this overlap is characterised by a universal model of adult education which Fitzsimons (2017, p. 54) describes as a consensus or conservative approach that is based on a homogenous, apolitical view of society. Community development outside of the overlap refers to processes such as policy interventions and participation in social partnership processes that does not involve convening adult learning groups. Overall, the organisation Community Work Ireland describe community development as framed around five core values:

1. Collectivity
2. Community Empowerment
3. Social Justice and Sustainable Development
4. Human Rights, Equality and Anti-discrimination
5. Participation [9]

2.2 The Changing Nature of Policy

Where the *Murphy Report* (1973) and the *Kenny Report* (1984) were in the main domestically conceived, government policy on adult education in the late 1990s and early 2000s was linked to a wider European commitment to the more individualised concept of lifelong learning. In

1998, the Green Paper, *Adult Education in an Era of Lifelong Learning*[10] set out a vision for the development of adult and community education. Although vocationally oriented in the first instance, the green paper also highlighted wider civic concerns and supported the idea that locally delivered education could help advance social change. This green paper led to the publication of a white paper, *Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education*.[11] This was, and still is, an important document for community education not least because it was produced following a lengthy consultation with groups on the ground including DALC. Although vocational at its core, *Learning for Life* (2000) offers a vision for society that is built on consciousness raising, citizenship, cohesion, cultural development and community building.[12] Importantly, the white paper led to the appointment of publicly funded Community Education Facilitators (CEFs) nationwide.

In 2013, the *Further Education and Training Act* led to the creation of SOLAS which has overall responsibility for the delivery of Further Education and Training (FET), a categorisation which, from a policy perspective, includes community education. FÁS, the state vocational training service, was merged with the 33 Vocational Education Committees (VECs) creating 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs) nationwide. This brought a national network of Community Training Centres (CTCs) under the auspices of ETBs, some of which were already supported by CVS organisations but others which were quite separate, and which often held a very different ethos and methodological approach.

In the years following the publication of the white paper, there was a concern on the ground about increased levels of bureaucracy and growing demands for measurable, employability related outputs to the detriment of other potential outcomes such as pursuing individual interests, personal development, critical thinking, and active engagement in social movements for change.[13]

2.2.1. The Further Education and Training (FET) Strategy (2014-2019)

In many respects this fear was confirmed through Ireland's first *Further Education and Training Strategy*, or FET strategy, which was published in 2013. Where *Learning for Life* (2000) contained a chapter dedicated to community education, this newer strategy's focus was much less interested in community education. Certainly, it recognised the importance of local education in supporting 'positive, personal, social and economic outcomes' but this was through an employability lens stating, 'it focuses its work on people who are distant from education and the labour market'. A similar frame was applied in terms of the need for adult

literacy programmes which, it states 'are provided to people inside and outside of the labour force'. [14]

The first FET strategy was criticised by many academics and practitioner associations for its top-down approach and its focus on individualist models of measurability that seek tangible employability related outcomes.[15] Critics agreed that community education should create spaces for those wishing to take up meaningful employment but were concerned this would become the sole focus for funders thereby under-appreciating the aforementioned incalculable aspects of community education. There were also concerns it would become more difficult to secure funding for non-accredited leisure-based, personal development and/or politicising programmes.

2.2.2. Further Education Strategy (FET) (2020-2024)

Ireland's second FET Strategy, *Future FET: Transforming Learning* (2020) acknowledges a more significant and broader role for community education, not least evidenced by a consultation process in the lead up to its publication that allowed people to input into its design. Much of this consultation was organised through existing provider networks for example the AONTAS Community Education Network (CEN) and the Community Education Facilitator's Association (CEFA) both of which have representation from the NEIC. One provider who contributed to this study captures sentiment sector wide when they share:

> One of our concerns would have been that community education was seen as an extension of FE and really it was just about getting people into employment and that kind of labour market agenda- the new strategy has certainly moved away from that which is really, really welcome.

Future FET describes community education as 'a critical part of provision' and as something characterised by 'ground-up initiatives developed to service the needs of particular localities, often in partnership with local organisations'.[16] Moreover, it highlights how a community-based ethos is critical to its effectiveness and success.

2.2.2.1 A Community Education Framework

Overall, *Future FET: Transforming Learning* (2020) sets out to develop three core pillars of **skills**, **inclusion**, and **pathways** which depend on the following four enabling themes of digital

transformation, learner and performance focus, staffing and structures, and capital development.

Chapter 6 'fostering inclusion' presents a framework for community education based on seven principles that are not entirely dissimilar to that the values outlined by ETBI and articulated in section 1.3.1 of this report. The Community Education Framework's principles are:

- Facilitating diversity
- Working in partnerships
- Ensuring consistency of support for community education
- Embedding technology to maximise access
- Delivering quality learning experiences
- Linking pathways within FET and beyond
- Tailoring an approach to data and outcomes to reflect delivery model

Figure 4 - Community Education Framework (SOLAS, 2020)

Although somewhat individualist at first glance, its focus on 'facilitating diversity of learning and learners' and its commitment to 'delivering quality learning experiences' both present scope to illuminate intangible, relational outcomes.

2.2.3 Literacy for Life - A Ten Year Adult Literacy Strategy

Future FET: Transforming Learning (2020) is not the only policy that is important for community education providers to be aware of. In 2021, and following consultation with over 2,000 stakeholders, Ireland's newest ten-year literacy strategy was published. *The Adult Literacy for Learning Strategy* promotes a 'cross-Government, cross-economy and cross-society approach that can help create a more equal, inclusive Ireland for all where everyone feels they can participate and belong'. Its vision is of an 'Ireland where every adult has the necessary literacy, numeracy and digital literacy to fully engage in society and realise their potential'.[17]

The strategy sets out a range of commitments and actions across four pillars to:

- ensure people can UNDERSTAND their needs and where to go to meet them.
- that they can ACCESS all of the learning and support they need.
- that the learning and support available can EXPAND to meet this massive challenge.
- that we EMPOWER people and communities to make a real difference to their lives.[18]

The Adult Literacy for Learning Strategy (2021) specifically names community education providers, and also 'ETB FET learning facilities' as central to the strategy and encourages joined-up thinking across these and other support agencies including local development companies, libraries, citizens information centres and a growing network of digital hubs. The strategy sets out thirteen ambitious actions as part of its initial implementation phase which have been reproduced in appendix 3.

2.2.4 National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education

There are also policy led targets to increase participation in Higher Education. Ireland's most recent National Access Plan ran from 2015-2019 (which was extended to 2022 in the context of the Covid19 pandemic) and sought to increase participation for the following groups:

- Entrants from socio-economic groups that have low levels of participation in HE.

- First time, mature students.
- Disabled people.
- People who wish to study via part-time, flexible options.
- Further Education award holders.
- Irish Travellers.

This is largely facilitated through ring-fenced budgets to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) who in turn create access pathways to entry such as foundation programmes and HEI community partnerships with schools and Further Education providers. Ireland's National Access Plan 2022-2025 will be published imminently and was produced with extensive consultation with a range of stakeholders.

2.2.5 Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities (2019-2024)

Whilst these policies are specific to adult and community education, there is an ongoing overlap with government policy more specifically directed towards the Irish Community and Voluntary Sector and community development more broadly. In 2019, the strategy *Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities* (2019-2024) was launched by the Irish government following extensive collaboration with Community Work Ireland. This policy reasserted a values-based approach to community work naming these as active participation, empowering communities, collectivity, social justice, sustainable development, human rights, equality and anti-discrimination. The main focus of the strategy is to support community development in incorporating the UN Sustainable Development Goals (appendix 1) into their work and working at local, national and international level to address climate change.[19]

2.2.6 Responding to NEIC Strategic Priorities

As well as being bound by the national policies outlined this far, adult and community education providers in the NEIC are also guided by the strategic priorities outlined in the *Mulvey Report* (2017) and subsequent strategic plans. In 2019, the Programme Implementation Board identified six working streams, to be progressed before 2022 naming these as:

1. Enhanced policing to improve engagement between An Garda Síochána and the local community.

2. Maximising educational, training and employment opportunities work stream, through opportunities for school goers but also young adults and the unemployed.
3. Improved family wellbeing, in particular youth wellbeing, through targeted supports in young people and mental health, and an expansion of individualised programmes to support 'hard to reach' young people.
4. Enhanced community wellbeing and physical environment work through improving the physical landscape and environment including through community events and arts projects.
5. Continue to make progress to reduce the demand for drugs and improve health outcomes for those with drug and alcohol misuse.
6. Integrate the alignment of services across Government departments and agencies and community services which include enhancing community leadership, progression pathways from schools and the uptake of quality childcare.

2.3 Networking and Supports across Community Education Providers

There are a number of national network organisations in situ. The first of these is the AONTAS Community Education Network (CEN), a network of over 100 independently managed community education providers. The CEN is a collaboration where organisations share information, engage in continuous professional development, submit joint proposals to government, campaign for change in the sector and overall, ensure that community education in Ireland is visible and valued. There is also the Community Education Facilitator's Association (CEFA) which is a professional representative organisation that seeks to share information across Education and Training Boards (ETBs), support each other's work and learn more about the community education more broadly. A core part of their work is to prepare policy submissions to government when invited to do so.

Specific to community development, Community Work Ireland (CWI) is a national organisation that supports community work as a way to address poverty, social exclusion and inequality. CWI centres their work around four core key pillars: influencing policy, resourcing practice, cross sectoral collaboration and growing the organisation.

This research also presents two examples to local network organising that illuminate networks that mirror the NEIC *Adult and Community Education Forum* in terms of its membership across independent and public providers.

2.3.1 Limerick Community Education Network as a model of practice

The Limerick CEN (established 1993) represents 15 adult and community education providers across independent and public (ETB) provision. The LCEN interpret community education as 'for the community within the community' and as something that 'aims to enhance learning, foster empowerment, and contribute to civic society'. In 2022, the LCEN published a three-year strategic plan that centred on five core ambitions:

1) **Co-ordination of community education provision,** through a forum of providers and stakeholders.
2) **Capacity-building, support and quality assurance,** by developing the knowledge and skills of network members.
3) **Promotion, outreach and awareness raising.**
4) **Policy development and advocacy** as a collective voice that seeks to influence and inform policy local, regional, and national level.
5) **Governance and operational management** to ensure high standards at all levels.

Ambition 3, promotion, outreach and awareness raising, is guided by a strategy to promote community education in existing communities; raise awareness within communities not already engaging; raise stakeholder awareness on the role and value of community education through research; raise awareness of the network itself; actively participate in wider events and gatherings at regional and national level; and develop their digital media presence.[20]

2.3.2 Donegal Community Education Forum as a model of practice

The Donegal Community Education Forum (est. 2007) also draws its membership from across independent and public providers and was convened in the first instance by the then Vocational Education Committee (VEC) Adult and Community Education Service, now Donegal ETB.

The forum's aim is 'recognising, promoting and advocating for community education and its resourcing in the county' and its stated objectives are as follows:

- Development of a strategic and collective approach to community education provision in the county.
- Identification of needs around community development and community leadership training. Improving access for potential learners.
- Vehicle for research into the benefits of community education.
- Information sharing.

In 2018, the Donegal community education forum carried out extensive research on the purpose of community education in the county from which the following recommendations were made.

- Create a shared vision of the values and principles of community education.
- Reassert governance and leadership and create a public annual forum.
- Sufficiently resource teaching/tutors working across the region.
- Ensure collaboration across community development and community education.
- Continue to raise burdensome administration demands with central funders and organisers (including SOLAS and QQI).[21]

2.4 The Impact of Covid19 on Adult Learning

Reflective of international experiences, the Covid19 pandemic has illuminated the importance of non-accredited learning and the wider role of community education in supporting people through unpredictable challenges. Almost all learning moved online, and digital inequality became more pronounced particularly in relation to access to devices such as laptops and secure internet connections. The community sector responded well, in fact it stood out amongst education providers for its flexible response where it leaned on long traditions of outreach work to immediately attend to the needs of vulnerable people.[22]

In 2020, AONTAS, a national organisation that advocates for the development and sustainment of quality services for adult learners, carried out a census of adult and community education in

Ireland that identified additional funding challenges for providers, and a sometimes significant backlog in demand for programmes often due to an increased demand for learner supports. The report also highlighted the need for extra supports across all programmes both accredited and non-accredited, greater provisions for blended learning options and, in particular, the importance of outreach and informal community engagement.[23] Based on these findings, AONTAS called for an equitable support plan for community education as part of a national response to educational inequality. Their census follow-on document recommended:

- A commitment to an equitable, sustainable, multi-annual funding package that empowers community education organisations to address the needs of learners and the local communities and that includes annual mitigation funding (see section 2.4.1), improved applications processes for funding, learner wrap around supports including onsite supports for intimate partner violence, mental health, and childcare, ring-fenced funding for non-accredited learning, and equity of access to accreditation by waivering validation costs for community education providers.
- Recognise community education as a key part of creating equity in tertiary education including access to higher education.
- Support evidence-based research on the impact of Covid19 on adult learners with an emphasis on 'marginalised learners'.[24]

2.4.1 The SOLAS Mitigating against Educational Disadvantage Fund

In 2020, and in response to the coronavirus pandemic, SOLAS introduced the Mitigating Against Educational Disadvantage Fund (MAEDF) which is in situ to provide extra funding to support educationally disadvantaged learners so they might better access community education. Community education providers can apply annually for MAEDF where their applications demonstrate:

- Community education as a mechanism to support and engage with disadvantaged learners.
- Outreach work to encourage re-engagement as well as innovative approaches to engage new learners.
- To invest in a digital infrastructure that will support blended approaches to learning.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter served a number of purposes relevant to the development of a local strategy for the NEIC. It located community education within its rich history of engagement. It also outlined the policy context for any strategic plan for the area outlining national and local policy initiatives. Finally, it offered two examples of networked practice in other geographical areas where community education providers network successfully. Chapter 3 will now turn to local provision and outline the current NEIC landscape.

[1] Fitzsimons, 2017, p. 71-2.
[2] LYCS, 2020, p. 3.
[3] This began with the European Social Fund (ESF) Poverty 1 and Poverty 2 projects of the 1980s. In 1991, a domestic *Community Development Programme* was launched, closely followed by a structure of Family Resource Centres and a national network of Local Area Partnership companies.
[4] Nexus, 2002, p. 33.
[5] NWCI, 1999.
[6] The Larkin Centre, N.D.
[7] Rourke, 2005, p. 7.
[8] Harvey, 2012; Bissett, 2015.
[9] Community Work Ireland, 2016, p. 8.
[10] Government of Ireland, 1998.
[11] Department of Education and Science, 2000. Learning for life coincided with a European Commission communiqué, *a Memorandum on Lifelong Learning,* which asked all member states to adopt lifelong learning as the pathway to a knowledge economy and that asked public education systems to adapt to vocational demands in the first instance.
[12] Ibid, p, 28.
[13] Fitzsimons, 2017, p. 144.
[14] SOLAS, 2014, p. 145.
[15] Murray, Grummell, & Ryan, 2014.
[16] SOLAS, 2020, p. 24.
[17] SOLAS, 2021, p. 33.
[18] Ibid., p. 10.
[19] Department of Rural and Community Development supported by the Cross Sectoral Group on Local and Community Development, 2019.
[20] Limerick Education Network, 2022.
[21] McGlynn, 2019.
[22] Cobain, Dowdall, O'Reilly, & Akisato, 2020.
[23] Ibid.
[24] O'Reilly, 2021.

Chapter 3. Local Provision of Adult and Community Education

Chapter 2 has outlined significant restructuring of adult and community education in recent years. One outcome of this realignment has been a closer working relationship between public and once independent community and voluntary sector organisations, many of whom now receive funding through one of 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs) across Ireland, either directly or indirectly.[1] The NEIC is no different and this chapter outlines the extent of local education provision, most of which is funded by the City of Dublin ETB as part of a multi-agency approach. Other funders include the SICAP programme, the Department of Social Protection, the Health Services Executive (HSE), Dublin City Council, Tusla (the Child and Family Agency) and through charitable donations.

These providers work across a broad spectrum of learners and respond to a multiplicity of needs that often emerge as a fall-out of the impacts of structural inequality. Providers seek to ensure quality, affordable personal, vocational and politicising supports. At the moment, there are accredited (certified) programmes from Level 2 to Level 6 in communications, maths, personal development, IT, horticulture, retail skills, social studies, community development, childcare, healthcare and early years education. There are also a range of non-certified options in global citizenship education, literacy, computers, English as a second language (ESOL), arts and crafts, singing, creative writing, photography, drama, cookery, music, dancing, health, wellness and fitness. There are also bespoke programmes for drug users that combat stigma and promote harm reduction, discussion groups on gender-based violence, and programmes that are directly targeted at men; a cohort often reluctant to engage, because, as one provider puts it 'it is a sign of weakness ... not able to be seen as stupid or being able to do it'. A full list of courses on offer in the NEIC can be found at appendix 4. As well as this rich tapestry of local education, many providers manage both formal and informal progression pathways into tertiary education where appropriate. As a result of this variance and the complexity of different population groups; there can be different interpretations on the nature of community education, the relationship between community education and community development, the relevance of accreditation and for some, the potential for duplication.

Overall, the organisations and groups we engaged with display high levels of commitment to the work that they do, and without exception were open to even greater collaboration across providers. This may, in part, be an outcome of the extensive collaborative review of adult education that was undertaken by researchers/staff within CDETB and a steering group of

people working within local projects. Their work culminated in the 2017 *From Patchwork to Network* review. This research identified high levels of commitment from staff and volunteers and 'a well-developed patchwork of services and projects … delivering much needed educational, training and development opportunities in the area focused in the main on local residents both young and old'.[2] However, it observed collaboration as *ad hoc* and at times reactive to particular circumstances and that some providers operated from unsuitable premises. One of the main recommendations of the research was to strengthen collaboration across providers in a coordinated way in order to maximise the impact of resources that are allocated to the area.[3] As a result, an *Adult and Community Education Forum* was established which is discussed in more detail in section 3.12. Before this, we provide an account of the main providers. Where possible we have included estimates on the number of people they work with annually.

3.1 The Central Role of Education and Training Boards (ETBs)

The largest funder and provider of adult education in the NEIC is the City of Dublin Education and Training Board (CDETB).[4] This is not their sole responsibility, rather, all ETBs hold responsibility for most non-secular secondary schools and for Further Education Colleges, such as Marino College of FE which is situated on the extremities of NEIC. ETBs also fund and oversee Youthreach centres; an alternative to school programme for teenagers and young adults. In the NEIC there is a Youthreach centre on North Great Georges Street, and a Youthreach Transition Centre on Parnell Square. ETBs also manage a growing national apprenticeship programme.

Adult and community education delivery is organised around particular posts of responsibility which are explained below.

Adult Education Organisers (AEOs)

The role of the AEO varies greatly across, and within, ETBs as they respond to the needs of adult learners and employers in diverse geographical, demographical and socio-economic contexts. Adult Education Organisers mostly work to identify further education and training needs, and to monitor and be accountable for existing programmes. Each AEO must develop responses uniquely suited to their area of responsibility, drawing on the staff, resources and

physical infrastructure available to them. In addition, they are responsible for collecting and collating large amounts of data for national reporting systems and implementing national policies relevant to the sector. The AEO assigned to work with the NEIC works across the postal codes Dublin 1, 3, 7 and some of 9.

Adult Education Guidance Initiative

Adult Education Organisers work with a wide range of stakeholders including adult guidance counsellors who form part of the Adult Education Guidance Initiative (AEGI). These guidance counsellors provide vital supports in directing adult learners towards programmes that meet their desired need be these for personal or vocational development. In particular, they provide information on literacy courses, Post Leaving Certificate courses, the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme, adult and community education courses and access to higher education courses. The AEGI for the inner city has two adult education guidance counsellors and an information officer. They also work across the North Inner City in totality and parts of the South Inner City.

Adult Literacy Organisers (ALOs)

Adult Literacy Organisers work amidst local communities supporting adults to return to learning in supportive group environments and/or through one-to-one tuition which is supported by a dedicated team of volunteers. There is one ALO with responsibility for supporting literacy needs in the NEIC.

Community Education Facilitators (CEFs)

There is also one CEF whose role is to strengthen work already being undertaken in local communities with a particular focus on developing and supporting local delivery. They assist new or existing community education providers through information on how they can source funding, support for developmental concerns and as a conduit to networking between and across groups who have a shared interest in community education.

3.1.1 CDETB Adult Education Service

The CDETB's Adult Education Service (AES) is based in Parnell Square and is both a funder and provider of accredited and non-accredited education programmes. To illustrate, the Parnell

Square AES has its own suite of programmes which includes literacy, pre-college programmes, one to one tuition, and a range of supports for people who are homeless. One particular aspect of its service delivery English for Speakers of Other Languages (or ESOL) programmes which incorporate communicative language skills and cross-cultural approaches that acknowledge a person's other languages.[5] The CDETB provides educational options to those involved with the justice system under the CDETB Pathways Service and the Drugs Court programme. It also funds other providers across the NEIC sometimes in the form of grant aid and sometimes on a per course basis by providing 'tutor hours'.

3.1.2 CDETB Estimates on Engagement

It is difficult to accurately estimate the number of people who avail of local education programmes not least because of the diversity of providers. Some information is available from the CDETB on overall engagement for the postal areas 1, 3 and 7 (i.e., area 83). In 2020, 3,700 adults engaged in adult learning courses across area 83, some of whom travelled from other postal regions. The following table shows a breakdown of who the CDETB Adult Education Service (area 83) provided for in 2021.

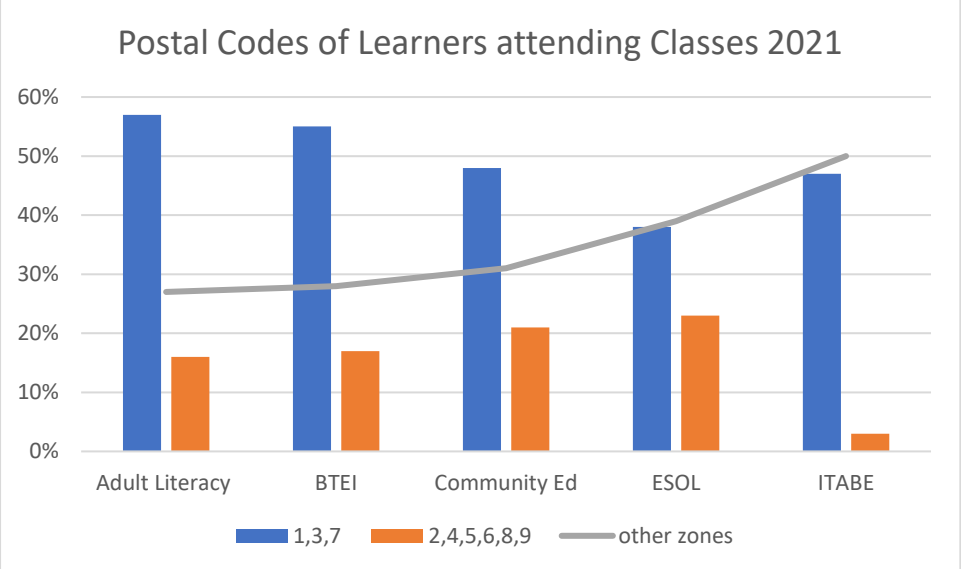


Figure 5 - Percentage breakdown by postal codes 1,3, 7 and 2,4,5,6,8, 9

3.2 Dublin Adult Learning Centre (DALC)

One of the key recipients of CDETB funding is DALC which was established in 1997 having evolved from the Dublin Literacy Centre which was formed in 1974. From its base in Mountjoy Square, DALC provides learning opportunities to residents in the NEIC and to those from further afield. The focus of much learning is on literacy, but it also provides QQI accredited programmes in nutrition, childcare and for special needs assistants. Dublin Adult Learning Centre provides services to new communities in the NEIC through ESOL and provides progression for ESOL participants into courses in other subjects such as nutrition and art. It also has a Community Employment programme where participants combine paid work with education. DALC offer daytime and evening programmes.

Beyond direct provision, staff and management within DALC actively participate in national network structures, for example, the AONTAS Community Education Network (see section 2.7). They have produced a number of manuals for tutors and have contributed to a number of publications by the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA).

Estimated learners per year: 650.
Funded by: City of Dublin ETB.

3.3 The Larkin Centre

The Larkin Centre (est. 1986) is based on the North Strand Road in Dublin 3. Its principal focus is to respond to the needs of the local population. It seeks to build the capacity of people with a particular emphasis on those impacted by unemployment, those seeking better jobs and those who are self-employed. Their services include a jobs club, information and support on self-employment, and a community education programme that includes bespoke programmes in men's health and wellbeing and horticulture. The Larkin Centre also delivers programmes in IT, childcare and special needs education. They run a crèche and a pre-school programme to facilitate parents to work outside the home. Their community education programme supports the following objectives:

- To widen the reach of learning to those classed as non-traditional learners.
- To give learners new options and raise expectations.
- To enable learners to bring about positive changes in their lives.

- To help learners develop the skills and knowledge to gain/enhance access to employment opportunities.
- To build capacity in the community.
- To provide accredited learning and progression options for learners.[6]

Funded by: A multi-agency model that includes CDETB, the HSE, and the Department of Social Protection.

3.4 Lourdes Youth and Community Services (LYCS)

The Lourdes Youth and Community Services, or LYCS, was established in 1984. It is an integrated, community education, training, recreation and development project that focuses on giving people the chance to become involved in their own development and in the development of their community. LYCS aims to create a welcoming, friendly, supportive and safe environment where good communication and relationships are fostered. They offer education that is learner-centred, participative, values-based and that encourages critical thinking. LYCS provides classes under three main categories: Well-being (e.g. Tai Chi, meditation), Skills (e.g. computers, ESOL), Arts (e.g. creative writing, stained glass).

One of the ways that LYCS seeks to empower local people is through an emphasis on Global Citizenship Education. This involves placing local issues in a global context to empower local people to become active players in our increasingly globalised and unequal world. Global Citizenship Education fosters critical thinking, active citizenships and a sense that addressing inequality is a global concern. LYCS has recently moved premises to James Joyce Street in Dublin 1.

Estimated learners per year: 60
Funded by: A multi-grant model including SICAP, the HSE, CDETB, Irish Aid and Dublin City Council.

3.5 Henrietta Adult and Community Education Service (HACE)

Henrietta Adult and Community Education Service (HACE) is a dedicated community education provider situated just outside the boundaries of the NEIC. It is run by the Catholic religious order the Daughters of Charity. Its central aim is to increase people's confidence and

facilitate them to learn at their own pace. This is done by creating supportive, welcoming environments where people can learn new skills and socialise as they work towards their own self-directed learning goals. The range of courses offered by HACE include arts and crafts, computers for beginners and improvers, Irish language classes, personal development programmes, yoga, stress management, and an ESOL programme. Most of HACE's programmes are run in the evening time and they run a range of accredited and non-accredited programmes.

Estimated learners per year: 230
Funded by: Daughters of Charity, CDETB, HSE, Tusla (the Child and Family Agency), Department of Education, the probation service and from private donations.

3.6 Hill Street Family Resource Centre

Hill Street Family Resource Centre (FRC) is part of a national network of Family Resource Centres (FRCs) that are committed to supporting families by responding to their needs in an inclusive and supportive environment that respects diversity and choice. Part of its suite of programmes includes being a focal point for a range of community activities which support and strengthen individuals, children and families to make informed life choices. They offer English as a Second language (ESOL) programmes, parenting courses and support positive mental health through its courses.

Funded by: A multi-funding mechanism including Tusla (the Child and Family Agency) and Dublin City Council.

3.7 North Wall Community Development Project

The North Wall Community Development Project (formally the North Wall Women's Centre) was established in 1985 and is based in Lower Sherriff Street, Dublin 1. It was originally set up by a group of women who wanted a safe meeting place in the area where they could support each other and learn together. The centre offered a second-chance at education by providing certified learning in maths, English and computers. It established drama groups to build self-esteem. Over the years it has evolved into a group that reaches out to the broader community,

not just women, although it still carries a strong perspective and analysis on women's issues such as childcare and welfare exclusion. It seeks interagency responses to these intersecting features rather than a single-issue focus. Its current vision is to empower people and develop communities. This is achieved through the following measures:

- A community crèche to support parents to engage in education and/or employment.
- A community employment scheme.
- Accredited and non-accredited programmes in personal development, literacy supports, childcare, sports and recreation, preparation for work and employability programmes, ESOL, and community gardening.

Estimated learners per year: 20 (specific to their community education programme).
Funded by: SICAP and some funding from the CDETB for their education programmes.

3.8 Ozanam House

Ozanam House is a Community Resource Centre that is based in Mountjoy Square. It is operated by the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, a national Christian based voluntary organisation that works with people experiencing poverty. It offers a range of adult education programmes that seek to develop skills and build people's confidence. Its building in the NEIC is used by many members from across the city. Subject to demand, it runs volunteer led classes in health and wellbeing, computers, DIY, arts and crafts and introductory classes in philosophy and psychology.

Funded by: Corporate donations, volunteers, in the past it has also received funding from the CDETB.

3.9 The SAOL project

The SAOL project is based on Amiens Street, Dublin 1. It is an integrated education, rehabilitation, advocacy and childcare programme that works with women in addiction recovery. The SAOL project works with women 'at any point along the continuum of change, supporting women who are changing their relationship with drugs, maintaining their stability with prescribed substances and/or choose to be drug free'. Its courses are designed around the

needs of its clients with a particular focus on wellness and communication skills development. They describe their work as creating an opportunity and platform for learning for people in an environment where they are valued and respected. They adopt what they describe as a 'Freirean model where the learners become teachers'. Participants are part of a community employment scheme. Their overall vision is 'working towards transforming the way in which Ireland responds to addiction and poverty'.

Funded by: North Inner City Drugs Task Force**,** Health Services Executive, The Probation Service and the City of Dublin ETB.

3.10 Swan Youth Services

Swan Youth Services are engaged with young people in the NEIC and provide a range of services. Swan's work is underpinned by what it describes as 'the critical social education model of youth work' where social issues that affect young people are understood as created and perpetuated by institutional structures including education structures as well as economics, and family structures. It 'is critical of an education system which is technical in approach as it teaches young people facts and formulas rather than educating and empowering them to think for themselves'.[7]

Funded by: A multi-agency approach through the Youth Justice Fund, The Youth Employment and Career Leap Programmes (funded by ETB), and NEIC Detached Youth Work Program (funded by the NEIC initiative).

3.11. The Pathways Centre

The Pathways Centre (est. 1996) is situated in Parnell Square, therefore just outside the boundaries of the NEIC and is an outreach initiative of the CDETB's prison education service. It supports a number of residents of the NEIC who are prisoners or former prisoners and is also open to their families, and members of the wider community. Their work consists of four elements: peer support work, education programmes and activities, guidance counselling, and personal addiction counselling. They offer study support, exam and college preparation, job

skills, social studies, creative skills including cookery photography and art, English, literacy and maths, and addiction studies.

Estimated learners per week: 60

Funding: CDETB

3.12 Other Local Education Opportunities

This section details other providers where their focus is not principally educational.

3.12.1 The Community After Schools Project (CASPr)

The Community After School Project (CASPr) is based in Portland Square and is a community development agency which aims to eliminate poverty by addressing the education need of young people and adults in the NEIC. Although most of the work of CASPr is with children, they also deliver QQI accredited programmes via the Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) which they target at adults who didn't complete second levels school and are in receipt of certain welfare supports.

Funded by: A multi-agency approach that includes SICAP, Tusla, the department of Children, Youth and Disability and the National Childcare Scheme. CASPr are also supported by St Vincent de Paul and by the CDETB.

3.12.2 Intercultural Ambassador Programme

One outcome of the NEIC's regeneration strategy has been the appointment of a Cultural Development Coordinator within Dublin City Council. The overall function of the role is to address low engagement of migrants and ethnic minorities in governance structures, to support language needs and to address interpersonal discrimination. In 2021, an intercultural ambassador programme was rolled out which encouraged more engaged citizenship for minority migrant groups and sought to address barriers to integration. The objectives of the ambassador programme were: to connect with others, to share and promote intercultural

dialogue and understanding between the many cultures within the NEIC, to develop leadership skills and inform policy, and to engage members of the community in intercultural work.

Funded by: Dublin City Council, the NEIC Taskforce.

3.12.3 The Irish National Organisation for the Unemployed

The Irish National Organisation for the Unemployed, which is based in North Richmond Street, provides training for people seeking employment and for those who are seeking to work with unemployed people. All of its courses are QQI Accredited.

Funded by: Department of Rural and Community Development, Pobal (under the scheme to support national organisations in the CVS), CDETB, the Department of Social Protection, the Department of Education and Skills and member subscriptions. They also generate income through some of the education programmes they deliver.

3.11. 5 The NEIC Community Arts Programme

The NEIC Community Arts Programme (est. 2021) is committed to the delivery of developmental arts programming in the area. The work has a strong community development focus and a key part of their ambitions is to meaningfully evaluate and track the work that they undertake into the future capturing the benefits of their work and progression in moving the work forward.

Funded by: Dublin City Council and Central Government

There are other providers also including the trade union SIPTU who offer ESOL classes for its members. Moreover, Shine, an organisation supporting people experiencing mental ill health receive some funding from the CDETB to delivering education programmes with participants referred by the health service.

3.12 The Adult and Community Education Forum

Many of the groups detailed above are members of the *Adult and Community Education Forum* which was established in 2017. The Forum's evolution was a direct output from the aforementioned review *From Patchwork to Network* (2017) that was introduced at the beginning of this chapter. Specifically, this forum is made up of nominees from adult and community education providers who have a funding relationship with CDETB, nominees from other projects and services who receive tutor hours from CDETB, and relevant staff from the CDETB Adult Education Service (AES). In line with the learner-centred, values based approach identified in section 1.3.1 the Forum recognise the personal, social and community benefits of community education, something they too interpret as wider than labour market activisation. Although many groups do attend, others are less inclined to engage and turnout at the Forum's monthly meetings can be sporadic, in part because of interruptions due to the coronavirus pandemic. Through a series of meetings held in 2017, the forum identified its specific aims as follows:

Communication

- Develop and foster relationships between the various providers and centres.
- Facilitate the sharing of information and increased communication and understanding between providers.
- Foster increased integration of the work with learners and participants while respecting the ethos and approaches of the different providers.
- Facilitate the sharing of good practice, innovative programmes and specific experience and expertise.
- Engage in events and initiatives which publicise and highlight the work, courses, programmes and services delivered by the range of providers.

Planning

- Develop a shared approach to the planning and delivery of adult and community education in the area.
- Contribute towards the development of an agreed strategic plan for adult and community education in the North Inner City.
- Promote increased sharing and use of facilities and equipment taking into account appropriate safeguards and insurance cover.

- Maximize the impacts, benefits and outcomes for participants and learners of the allocated funding for adult and community education in the North Inner City.

Progression

- Promote the engagement of learners and participants in adult and community education.
- Maximise the referral and recruitment of learners and participants to adult and community education services by liaising with other CDETB funded services and initiatives and other statutory and community agencies and services.
- Develop clear progression routes and pathways between the various providers and centres for learners and participants.

Training/Joint Events

- Facilitate adult and community education providers to engage in joint training and policy development initiatives.
- Enable providers to contribute to the identification of emerging policy issues and the discussion of possible responses to such issues.
- Promote the development and delivery of inter provider events and activities.[8]

It is important to acknowledge the labour involved in establishing and maintaining a forum such as this. The achievements to date were made possible because of a dedicated resource person working within the CDETB AES. The importance of resourcing such networking has been recognised within government publications. Specifically, the current five-year strategy to support the community and voluntary sector in Ireland 2019-2024 *Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities* notes:

> Government is also responsible for providing an enabling framework to support the sector to achieve positive societal change – for example, facilitating advocacy on behalf of communities, supporting dialogue contributing to programme design, and developing capacity in the sector to inform Government policy.[9]

The need for dedicated resources to advance a local strategy will be re-visited in section 5.2

3.13 Further Education and Higher Education proximal to the NEIC

The organisations and projects outlined thus far are not the only providers of education to adults in the NEIC. This next section details Further and Higher Education provision proximal to the NEIC. Moreover, in March 2022, it was announced that Cathal Brugha Street College (previously part of TU Dublin) will be developed as a Further Education provider. The college will include a centralised admissions office, career guidance and learner information, an Apprenticeship, Traineeship and Employer Engagement Unit and a bespoke literacy and numeracy support unit. It should also be recognised that residents from within the NEIC also often access Further Education in other colleges in Dublin including Cabra College which is located in nearby Dublin 7.

3.13.1. Marino College of Further Education

Marino College of Further Education is situated on the North Strand Road in Dublin 1. It is a CDETB college and offers a range of services and supports including career guidance and counselling, information on student grants, and a range of student activities.

Marino College operates through a learner-centred philosophy that seeks to respond to the changing dynamics of the workplace in preparing students for employment and pathways to higher education in preparing students for further study. Their principal programmes are:

- **Post Leaving Certificate** programmes across Nursing and Healthcare, Business, Tourism, Creative and Performance Arts, Beauty and Childcare.

- **Back to Education** programmes across customer services and office skills, health services skills, IT skills and computer graphics, hotel front office, retail sales skills, community development and starter courses with English.

3.13.2 National College of Ireland

There is also a Higher Education Institution (HEI) in the NEIC namely The National College of Ireland (NCI) which is situated on Mayor Street close to the Irish Financial Services Centre. The NCI has a long history of connecting positively within its neighbourhood. Although the NCI does not have an official access office, they forge connections with the community in other ways. In particular, their Early Education Initiative runs a number of programmes for

parents (and also children) that seek to support education from primary school through to third level. Included in its objectives are ambitions to develop the skills, knowledge and dispositions of participants, providing supports for people settling into higher education, supporting families in need through interagency collaboration and researching new ways of engaging with the NEIC and other communities it works within. The NCI also has a schools liaison officer who supports a link programme within local schools.

The NCI offer free courses through their Springboard+ initiative, a government funded scheme to address skills shortages in the workforce. They also run a number of scholarship and discounted programmes for non-traditional learners including pathways for people seeking asylum in Ireland. There are also support pathways to post-graduate education, some of which are full-cost supports. The NCI have a growing suite of apprenticeship programmes including financial services apprenticeships. They have forged positive relationships with some employers in the area including within the Irish Financial Services Sector.

3.13.3 Technological University Dublin

Another HEI close to the NEIC is Technological University Dublin (TU Dublin) the largest university in Ireland. In accordance with the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education (section 2.2.4), TU Dublin offers five entry pathways for students:

1. **Higher Education Access Entry Route (HEAR)** is a direct entry school leavers access route where people who have experienced socio-economic disadvantage, are given compensatory additional 'points' for college entry.

2. **Disability Access Route to Education (DARE)** is a direct entry school leavers access route for disabled people and people with an identifiable learning difficulty. DARE entrants also receive additional 'points' for college entry.

3. **QQI Access TU Dublin** is for students who have completed a QQI level 5 or 6 major award and who are availing of the Higher Education Links Scheme (HELS).

4. **Access TU Dublin** is a flexible entry route for school leavers from socio economically disadvantaged backgrounds who would like to study a full-time undergraduate course in TU Dublin but who may not meet the requirements for the HEAR programme.

5. **TU Dublin Access Foundation** is a multidisciplinary one-year full-time programme that prepares adults for college life. Successful students are offered a place on undergraduate programmes.

Local providers also detail positive working relationships with other universities including Trinity College Dublin's Access office and some connections with Maynooth University in particular their Department of Applied Social Studies who deliver a range of programmes in Community Development and Youth Studies.

3.14 Conclusion

This chapter mapped a rich tapestry of provision across the NEIC and highlighted the central role that is played by the City of Dublin ETB.

It is also worth highlighting the multiplicity of funders with many organisations managing different administrative systems and structures across a range of different entities. This is not unique to the NEIC rather research by AONTAS found that across 76 organisations with a community education dimension, nine different government departments oversaw 51 different funding streams resulting in providers spending significant time and effort keeping on top of their administrative burdens.[10]

In the next chapter, we share first-hand accounts from those at the coal face – both learners and providers as well as providing insights into how the work is perceived by wider residents of the NEIC who are not currently involved in local education and training.

[1] Magrath & Fitzsimons, 2020.
2 Farrelly, 2017, p. 106.
[3] Farrelly, 2017, p. 107.
[4] The North Inner City is one of five regions across Dublin city provided for by the City of Dublin Education and Training Board (DCETB).
5 Source: http://cityofdublin.etb.ie/esol/ accessed 27th January 2022.
6 Larkin Unemployment Centre, 2022.

[7] Swan Youth Services, 2021, p. 18.
[8] City of Dublin ETB, 2018, p. 2-3.
[9] Government of Ireland, 2019, p. 8.
[10] Cobain, Dowdall, O'Reilly, & Akisato, 2020.

Chapter 4. The Benefits and Challenges of Adult and Community Education

This chapter principally focuses on primary research findings across the cohorts identified in section 1.4 namely local residents, education providers across the spectrum of adult learning (therefore including tertiary education) and other stakeholders working and volunteering in the North East Inner City (NEIC). It also draws from selected literature where there is congruence, or marked difference with previous similar research on the benefits and challenges of community-based education. Five themes emerge:

1. The transformative impacts of community-based education
2. Ways in, and retention through, local providers
3. The stated needs of residents
4. The potential to reach more
5. Progression pathways

After each theme, a short analysis is offered.

4.1 The Transformative Impacts of Adult and Community Education

Much previous research has identified the personal benefits of engaging in a locally-based programme that embodies the values-based approach this research is informed by. For example, the report *The Social Impacts of Community-Based Adult Education in Limerick* (2011) cited a variety of personal benefits including addressing loneliness and improving mental health. Similarly research by AONTAS found significant personal development outcomes including decreased isolation, greater resilience, and higher levels of self-esteem and confidence.[1] Both reports also identify wider community benefits beyond the individual experience.

4.1.1 Individual Impacts

This research is no different. Participants repeatedly cited positive benefits from taking part in local education. A number of respondents commented on improved mental health and overall

wellbeing; in fact, there were situations where education acted as a lifeline. One resident of the NEIC, who is currently living in a homeless hostel, shares, 'I love to come to my course, it clears my head, learning new things, meeting people of the same interest, talking about things, worth getting out of bed for, better than sitting in the hostel getting your head melted'. Another participant, who had a history of problematic drug use, describes her course as the thing that 'is doing me the world of good and keeping me on track'. Others too talked about the importance of, as one person put it 'a change of scene'. Overall, many people described the impact of community-based education as transformative. Comments included, 'It's the best thing I have ever done in my life' from one, and 'it was incredible, an incredible group of people, some really good conversations but also personal conversations' from another. They continue 'I love studying now, and it was something I never had in school, I just hated school. It's something I am hooked on now and I will keep going'. This isn't the only time focus group participants talked, sometimes at length, about the how reengaging in education as adults helped compensate for negative school experiences when they were children. Some of these voices were from people who had left school in their early teens following high levels of absenteeism and who, in the subsequent years, had become parents at a young age. One such woman described the opportunity to engage in adult learning now her children were a little older as 'a lifeline'.

More tangible educational outcomes were also shared. Some people were vocal about how their capacity to read and write had improved, others spoke about more fluency with the English language. A few talked about a better sense of managing computers. For those undertaking certified courses, there was a real sense of possibility in their capacity to secure work in an occupation they enjoyed. There were reports of physical improvements as an outcome of health and wellbeing courses including improved fitness levels. For some men involved in community education, there were reports of reduced drug and alcohol misuse.

4.1.2. Community/Social Impacts

Research on the benefits of community education frequently identify the impacts for wider family members and the community at large[2] and again this study is no exception. There are reports of better communication within families and of greater levels of interest in their own children's journey through education including reports that children stayed in school longer. Some participants on a special needs assistant programme were better able to support disabled family members. For example, one focus group participant explains, 'my daughter has autism

[a developmental disability], this course wasn't about me getting a job, it was about being able to better support her'. She shares how the benefits were particularly felt during the Covid19 pandemic 'because all the services were stopped so this course gave an insight into what can happen and how I can support her best'.

There is also a sense of building community. This participant, currently doing a yoga class, shared 'the fact that I was living on my own [going to this course] meant that I was part of a group, part of the community'. Another in this same group said, 'participating in this group gives you energy to keep going … in this class, especially, we feel very much like a community we feel that we are all in this together'.

Other benefits outlined included being more aware of local social issues specifically a greater cognisance of stigma relating to long-term unemployment and how other people's perceptions because of class-based stigma can negatively influence an employer's decision.[3] People were also better able to analyse higher than average levels of early school leaving in their community when compared to other geographical areas and had a more nuanced sense of the global reasons as to why migration is as high as it currently is. There were fewer examples of community education having an overtly politicising impact, something that mirrors research elsewhere.[4]

4.1.3 The Challenges in Measuring Outcomes

There is a sense, however, that policy makers don't always recognise the social returns for financial investment that are clearly evident in these testimonies; rather there can be pressure to provide measurable outcomes. In one provider focus group, there is discussion about a misalignment between a funding model that seeks quantifiable results and a process-oriented approach that is often slow and relational in nature. This selected text captures wider sentiment in the group:

> It's a snail's pace. Like, this is years and years … these things take years and years to embed. That's actually work. The pilot programmes just don't work here. A lot of money goes into pilot programmes … but we need people out there interacting with people because that is what works, that is how we get to people, again and again.

Another provider, this time within a one-to-one interview, equally provides a striking example of the incongruence of seeking to measure outcomes quantitatively when they share a story about a group who met three times a week throughout the Covid19 pandemic to sing outdoors.

They tell us some of those involved reported that this simple action 'saved their lives and increased their sense of community'. The provider legitimately asks 'how do we measure the act of singing. family reunification and saving lives?'

In particular, there are challenges surrounding the current Programme Learner Support System (PLSS), a joint initiative by ETBI and SOLAS which asks providers to measure outcomes and performance from adult education programmes funded through ETBs. The system is described as time consuming, intrusive and cumbersome in terms of hours spent on paperwork for each learner on top of an already bureaucratised system. One stakeholder, who is not a provider themselves but who works closely with community educators shares how even they have picked up on this:

> I think what has been provided by the ETB and the adult education centres is great, but like I think they're quite constrained and I would hear the frustration of their tutors by you know, having to report QQI numbers to SOLAS and being more almost judged on that, rather than the more the unmeasurable that are, I would say, the qualitative side of education … education for citizenship.

There is some interest in the 'distance travelled' evaluation tool developed for the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) 2019. This sets out to measure 'soft' outcomes of the kind that an individual gains on the way to achieving a goal (or hard outcome) which can then be objectively validated. But this model is not universally celebrated because, as one provider puts it 'everyone's journey is different'.

Analysis

Investment in adult and community education brings a vast array of benefits to those who engage and clearly has a positive impact on many people's lives. The transformative, life changing – even lifesaving nature of the work is evident. Moreover, its politicising potential is evident through its capacity to nurture critical thinking. This is recognised in Ireland's current FET Strategy *Future FET* which describes 'skills for life through the provision that supports citizenship and prosperity across communities and develops social capital' as 'just as critical as skills for work'.[5]

However, critical thinking as an outcome was less evident than personal development. One reason why may be linked to limited referral pathways into local education (which will be discussed as the next theme) or because of constraints imposed by PLSS which not only creates

unnecessary stress and labour for workers, but privileges accredited-certified learning over non-accredited learning. Systems such as PLSS are not unique to Ireland but rather are part of a growth in bureaucratisation across Europe when measuring lifelong learning. Because of the challenges in measuring the work, results captured are partial. This is because it is easy to measure the numbers of people graduating with certificates, but more challenging to capture the transformative nature of the work, the relationship building and the informal conversations that support people in managing a range of life challenges including intimate partner violence, homelessness, and the many symptoms of inequality.

Challenges with measuring outcomes is not isolated to the NEIC. Other research commissioned by ETBI revealed similar concerns about SOLAS's current mode of measurement. It states, 'while PLSS has the capacity to capture some of Community Education's diverse benefits and outcomes… it is unable to provide a complete picture of Community Education's role and impact'. The report acknowledges 'there are no administrative systems in place to capture and track these outcomes'.[6]

4.2 Ways in, and retention through, Adult and Community Education

There is a myriad of ways people access local education. Some learners are referred through the CDETB Adult Education Guidance Initiative (see section 3.1.1) or through encounters with other professions, for example, public health nurses or school teachers. Others self-refer and there are examples of people responding to social media advertisements and local campaigns such as posters or fliers. Overall, the most commonly cited way people found their way into local education was through word of mouth. This example below is typical:

> I heard about the course because my cousin's wife did it last year so she was after telling me about it. And then in the meantime my daughter was diagnosed with autism, so it was something that I wanted to do kind of for me because it was all new to me so it was not just for a job aspect it was more just for myself.

A small number of people found out about programmes via their employers.

4.2.1 Referral through the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection

One particular pathway that generated discussion across learners and providers alike was referrals through the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP), the government department responsible for administering and managing referrals for people in receipt of certain social welfare payments. The Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) is often the funding mechanism used. This provides payment for attending a course where a person meets certain criteria benchmarked against their previous levels of certified education and their eligibility for Jobseekers Payment or other means tested social welfare supports. Much of this referral work is organised through a publicly funded, but independently managed, entity called Seetec.

Where learners in receipt of Jobseekers Allowance are referred to programmes via Seetec, they were often appreciative of this opportunity but frustrated about certain limits Seetec imposed in terms of choice. To illustrate, 'I wanted to do a photography course' one woman explained continuing 'but I was told I wasn't allowed and that I had to do this one [SNA certificate] because there were more jobs in this area'. Within a second focus group, another participant demonstrates the same point and asks:

> Does the social welfare – do they let people know about these courses already? I don't think so do they? – there is certain ones that they do – like they have online ones for getting back into employment but have they got ones for getting people back into education?

Although providers recognise the significant potential of the BTEI, they share some of these frustrations. The DEASP are described as a 'gatekeeper' by a number of providers and interpreted as exercising considerable power over who can and cannot access education. There is a sense that referral pathways are ad hoc, and that these pathways can indeed mitigate against learners' interests in favour of labour market activation. One provider shares, 'the key word at the moment is activation and it's divisory, it's divisive'. They describe the potential breadth of possible referral options but believe the way social welfare supports are currently managed has moved away from historic models. One previous model was where a community welfare officer was more embedded in the locality. A second past model was the more recent JobPath programme where 'jobs facilitators' were better at linking with local services. Again referencing the pressures to ensure measurable outcomes, they relay their frustrations as follows:

> The DSP are meant to identify training options and the ETB is to respond to it but the ETB is waiting for the data. The department are struggling in my opinion, and it's not working. I think they've done a couple of surveys but its fallen flat. How do they determine suitability- eligibility- DSP call the shots.

Another provider also comments on how some are not 'afforded the right to opportunity to move forward in life' rather they are only offered programmes within a limited parameter of options. They continue:

> We've kind of gone [too far] down the route of literacy, computers and if I'm looking at my area, I'm thinking has it made a difference? No! I don't think it has … and I find that all the time and I think it's something we need to look at.

Another also raises a concern about unnecessary pressure for people to engage in programmes with an employment related outcomes:

> The issue I think is balancing labour activation with lifelong learning and you know 'learning for the sake of learning'. Learning for yourself and you might not be remotely interested in a job, you might not be interested remotely in anything over a QQI level 3.

Another local provider looks to the adult education sector itself to be clearer in how it articulates the work that it does and the opportunities it creates. One way to do this is to be clearer about the relationship between community education and community development (see section 2.1.1) They explain:

> If in the sector we are a bit confused ourselves, other people might be confused … I think the most valuable work in community education is people at the lower levels … we do it in a holistic kind of authentic way in as much a practice way… if you were outside the sector you may not understand … maybe this is the role of this strategy. That we're clear to people who don't work in the sector what community education is.

4.2.3 The Healthy Communities Project

There is also scope for referral via the NEIC Healthy Communities Project which is supported by the HSE. This initiative seeks to tackle health inequalities through social prescribing, in other words, by recognising the importance of non-medical supports in addressing aspects of a person's wellbeing. The programme encourages healthcare professionals to become aware of supports available in the area and refer a person to these supports as a form of treatment. The programme is overseen by the Dublin City Community Cooperative and has the support of TASC, an expert research organisation and think-tank whose mission is to address inequality

and poverty through action research. Adult and community education providers were aware of the potentials of this programme but, in this particular study, none of the learners we engaged with declared finding their way into courses in this way.

4.2.4 Care as a Model of Retention

To this point we have outlined ways into adult and community education. In terms of the reasons why a person stays involved, the strongest theme to emerge is the supportive atmosphere a person typically encounters. There are frequent and repeated references to the welcoming, hospitable spaces where there are high levels of respect and care. Many spoke about staff putting them at ease. One man describes taking that first step in publicly acknowledging his struggles with reading and writing. He described 'the fear of walking in and seeing someone you know in the canteen' continuing,

> When I walked in here, I was thinking, she [the course coordinator] knows I can't read and write, and I was embarrassed. But then I was put at ease and realised there were other people who were in the same boat as I was in.

In another example, one woman describes how it was put to her by a local adult educator that she might enjoy a course in child psychology. Her initial thought was 'Yeah, I'd love to do it. But I thought maybe I am not intelligent enough to do it, I doubted myself' but because of the encouragement by the educator, she overcame this initial fear and 'did really well in the end'. Someone else shares a similar experience:

> When I went back to do the level 6, I was very nervous. I haven't done assignments in a long time, but [names tutor] puts you at ease … she has a way of explaining things and you enjoy it, it's not like a chore.

Others too directed much positivity towards the pedagogic approach adopted by the tutor/facilitator. For example:

> I hate studying, I am not academic at all but [names tutor] she makes it so easy; it doesn't go over your head, you are not overwhelmed with too much knowledge or stuff like that … and I hate assignments but even that feels easier.

Providers understand the care that is required to support people in taking that first step, in fact a recurrent theme is to describe this initial engagement as one of the most important aspects of the work or, as this provider puts it, 'understanding that referring someone to an adult education

course once a week could change their life'. They continue 'sometimes for people actually that little kind of push can really work because once they get here, they really love it but it's getting them in the door'. Many talked about using introductory programmes for example in leisure and/or basic skills programmes (e.g., in English, maths and Irish) as ways to 'get them interested first, and then they may engage in wider learning' as one provider explains.

Adult education providers also understand the potential impact of previous negative educational experiences. Some talked, at times at length, about how they are sensitive to a sense of loss, and sometimes even trauma, from school experiences. Their job is to create alternative environments and to make sure they always remember that 'classrooms can trigger and retraumatise people' (provider quote). Another provider describes their role as to 'encourage people to get involved in education especially people who missed out on education the first time around' and refer to the way this can have wider community benefits in relation to 'education for themselves and then for their children' as a result of a more positive experience of learning. One final selected contribution captures the weight of sentiment often expressed:

> The barrier to most of the disadvantaged areas is the formality of classrooms and formal education. It's not attractive to this cohort- everyone is asking how we attract learners. The work that needs to be done with this group is around informal learning - promoting dialogical spaces that encourage and value learners and most importantly, promote self-value. From here you develop leaders from these groups, who act as role models. Many of whom learn to love and value education and go onto FE and HE.

Many providers understand that community education should not be an extension of a school system that reproduces inequality. Instead, they frame it as a space for social and political consciousness-raising where curricula can ensure active engagement with learners as partners in this process.

There are other factors that supported people's capacity to stay the course with a number of participants referring to structures and systems that allowed them to learn at their own pace. For some, the learner-centredness they experienced was the opportunity to learn online. This woman, who wouldn't have come to a face-to-face course, explains her own difficult circumstances and how the option to learn online was a great support.

> I actually had a friend who tried to commit suicide so mental health area was one that I really wanted to get to know, because I didn't know how to deal with it. I figured if I knew something more, I could have dealt with this in a better way. So for me, when this course came up, my God, it amazed me. Because it was online it was a huge benefit for

> me. I thought it was amazing. Yeah, and it worked around the hours that I was available, like it was one evening a week. And it was just a few hours, which you can commit to. Yeah, because that was very important as well. I mean, committing to full time, it's so much harder.

A number of people talked about affordability. One woman who was completing a Level 5 major award shared, 'I just wouldn't have been able to afford another option', a sentiment echoed by others in the group. Proximity to home is also important and, for some, proximity to their children's school.

Analysis

People find their way into adult and community education through a variety of information sources and routes including on the advice of the CDETB adult guidance service and as suggested by their employer. Most people self-refer and this is frequently because of the snowballing impact of the benefits of learning. This word-of-mouth approach doesn't happen by accident rather is a significant outcome of the informal outreach work providers do alongside annual promotional events, regular local advertising and some successful engagement with social media platforms.

Referral pathway through the DEASP are present but are *ad hoc*, a finding that mirrors previous commentary from the NEIC ACE Forum whose most recent briefing outlines how 'ideally, there should be a structured 'flow' of referrals as individuals come into contact with DEASP who can then be referred to a programme or course provider. Assessing a person's suitability for a programme could then be more collaborative between the Case Officer, CDETB Adult Education Service/Guidance Service and the programme provider'.[7]

Although there is some work to be done in enhancing this pathway in particular, it is clear that once engaged, the values based philosophies underpinning the work is a significant resource in its own right. This work aligns with the Community Education Framework (see section 2.2.2.1) which, although principally focused on employability, does identify 'delivering quality learning experiences' as a fundamental aspect of the work.

4.3 The Stated Needs of Residents

This study asked 360 residents (who responded to an open survey) to identify their own needs that might lead them to enroll in a local education programme. These are quantified in figure 6 overleaf. As with all survey questions, respondents were invited to identify as many options as were relevant to their circumstances.

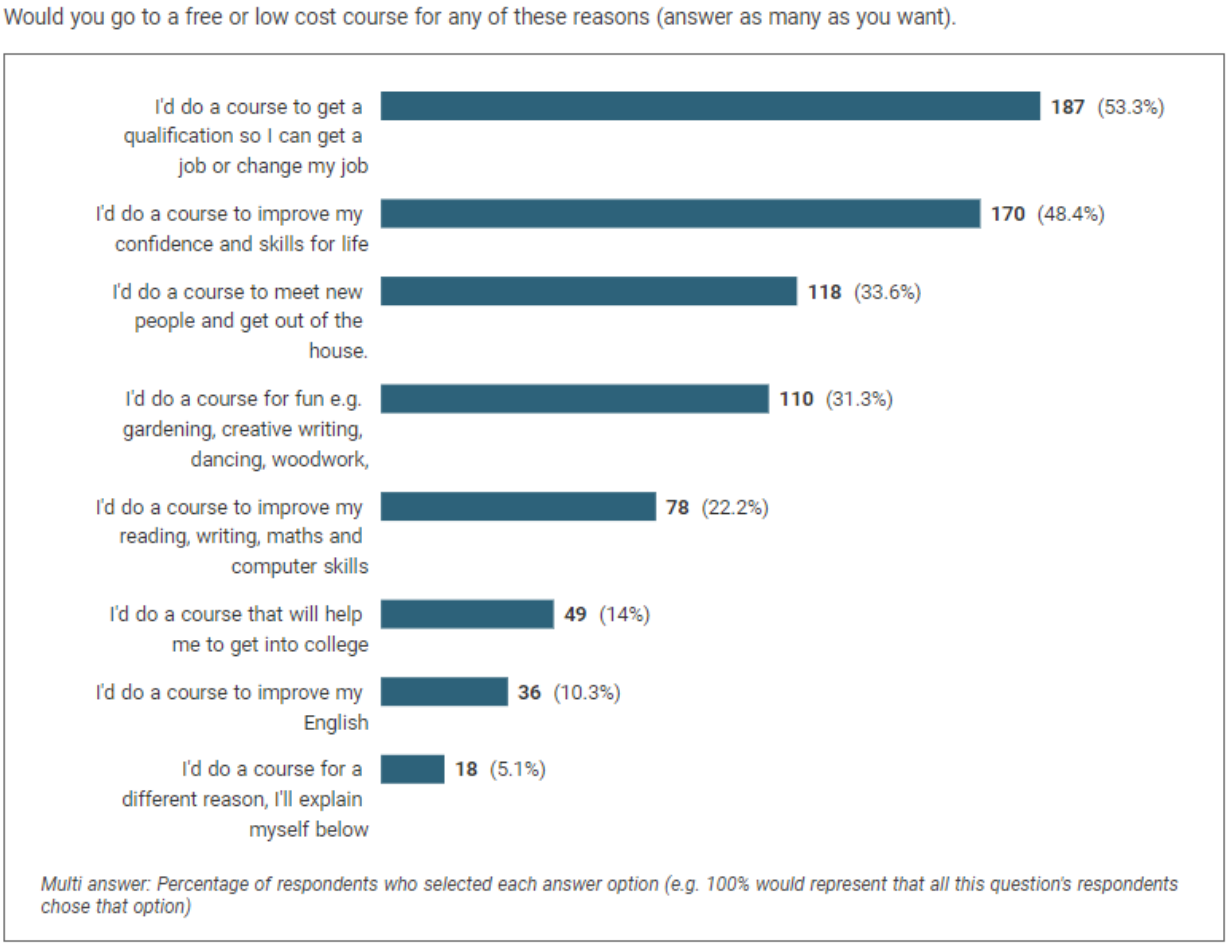


Figure 6 - The stated needs of residents.

Our questionnaire allowed qualitative textual contributions and 18 people left comments reiterating an interest in vocational training, re-stating a desire to develop new skills and repeating self-improvement as a motivating factor. One respondent captured how there is often more than one motivation. For example, 'I would do a course for many of the above reasons. Not just one. To meet people, learn to learn in a positive place. Hopefully get a job. And have some fun doing things I like'. Residents also suggested particular courses that they would welcome and a complete list is included as Appendix 5. In summary these are:

- Health /wellness / personal development (n15).
- Life skills including cooking / driving / budgeting / parenting (n14).
- Languages / culture / drama / art (n12).
- Literacy / digital literacy / numeracy (n8).
- Career development / job seeking skills (n5).
- Social studies / law / advocacy (n7).

4.3.1 Structural Barriers to Participation

One of the most significant survey findings was that as many as 39 percent of the residents we engaged with didn't know there were local opportunities in NEIC. A further 30 percent did know, but had never enrolled for a variety of reasons including already holding graduate and post-graduate qualifications.

For those who might benefit from local opportunities, their capacity to engage is perhaps most tied up in their availability. Many of the 360 people we surveyed shared a myriad of barriers to participation.

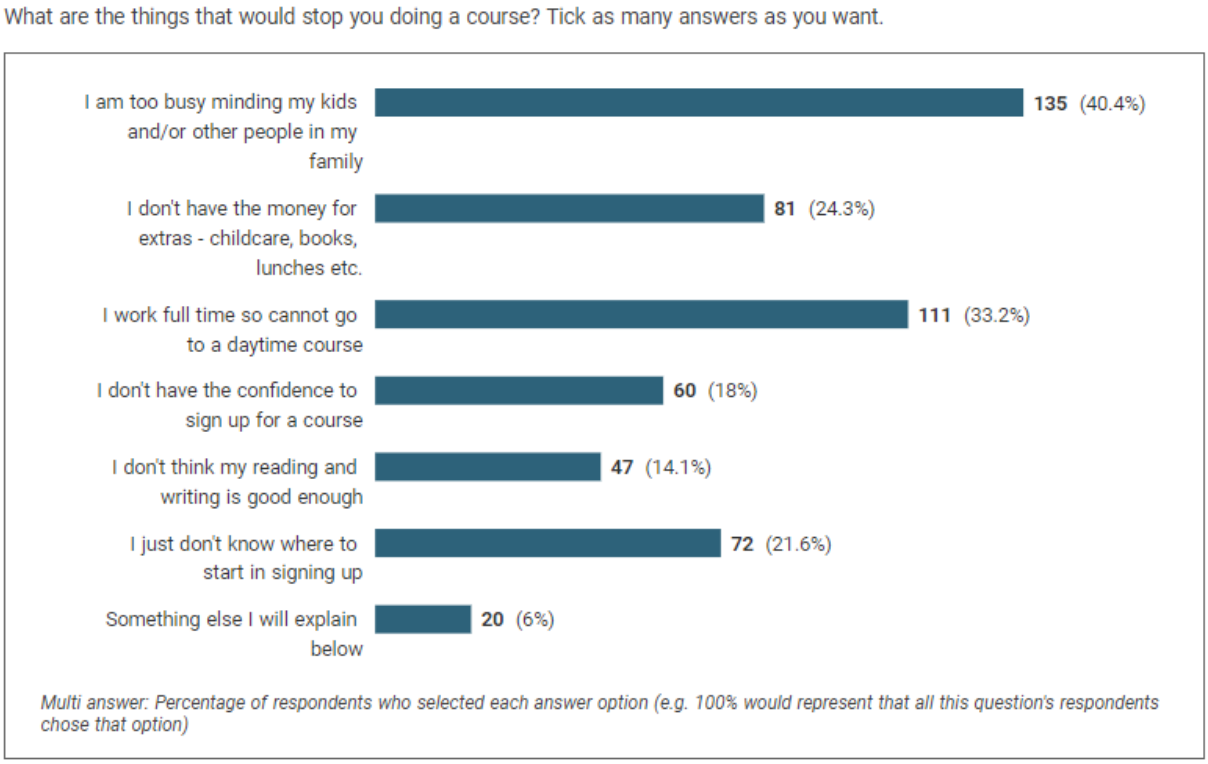


Figure 7 - Barriers to participation

As is evident in figure 7, care responsibilities (shared across all genders) feature strongly. Survey respondents share, 'childcare main issue. If I could bring baby along'. Another writes 'I'm a full-time carer, so find it hard to get some *me time'*. Focus group participants also highlight the challenges in juggling multiple responsibilities. This isn't a finding unique to this study. For example, previous research by the organisation One Family found people parenting alone are 20 percent less likely to participate in adult learning because of a myriad of challenges including access to wealth, the workplace and childcare.[8] This is not helped by the fact that Ireland has one of the most expensive childcare systems in Europe.[9] Even where community organisations provide wrap around services such as childcare, their capacity is often insufficient to meet demand. For example, LYCS currently have over 100 children on its Early Years waiting list.

Another overlapping theme to emerge was that, even when education is free, ancillary costs make it an expensive option, something 24 percent cited as a barrier to participation. This survey contribution captures this theme well:

> It's hard for single mothers or other people with financial limits to get access to course above certificate level due funding constraints. I'd love to see funding set aside above the sometimes €500 limit to help people access diplomas, degrees, masters etc., especially when the majority of these people are looking to better themselves to be in a position to give back and return to the NEIC and give back.

Moreover, 33 percent perceived daytime work commitments as a barrier to participation. This means they were likely unaware of a range of evening options. Another perceived barrier is a sense, for over one in five people, that they did not know how to sign up for a course.

As is to be expected, it wasn't unusual for people to cite multiple barriers. To give just one example, one man in his thirties details care responsibilities, not enough money for the extras, working full time, being concerned about his own reading and writing capacity and not knowing where to sign up. Others had health problems, compounded by infrastructural issues. To demonstrate:

> I suffer with an auto immune condition and problem with chronic pain and mobility after a spinal fusion so it is really difficult to get to classes on most days. There is no Wi-Fi where I'm living.

Structural factors also feature strongly as with this second example:

> I feel that there needs to be more consideration into the other barriers to education that people from NEIC face such as living in cramped conditions or homelessness, it is hard to put your all into something in these conditions, people need a safe space to study etc.

Two migrants spoke about being ineligible for particular courses because of their residency status. One writes 'This course is for EU CITIZENS OR ONLY FOR STAMP 4 BUT NOT FOR STAMP 1 (open work permit)'. There can also be structural barriers for some migrants where qualifications awarded overseas are not recognised in Ireland.

Problems with reading and writing were also mentioned. For example, 'my reading is not very good'. This resulted in a lack of self-assurance for one respondent sharing, 'It would be a lack of confidence and embarrassment' that would keep them away.

4.3.2 Limited Choice as a Barrier to Participation

Another finding is how the funding model in situ limited some providers' options on what courses to run. This voice explains, 'I can't ring up the ETB and say I need to put on classes for fathers, could we look at this'. The likely response they report is:

> 'Well we've got an art teacher and a computer teacher, guitar teacher', it's like, this is the menu. But that's not really community education it's a type education that I would describe as something slightly different.

Another provider shares challenges in matching the skills of the tutors allocated by the ETB with the needs of particular adult learning groups. They believe this could be avoided if a centre could autonomously hire their own tutors, then claim the expense back from the ETB. There have been situations where groups have, to quote one provider, 'lost tutors' (where they have moved to other posts outside of the ETB) resulting in a time lag in new tutor being assigned to work with a project. Typically, these situations are created by the nature of contracts ETB tutors hold. This same problem was also identified in the 2017 *From Patchwork to Network* (2017) report which concluded restrictions on funding can negatively impact the work local education providers do.

The inadequacy of buildings can also limit choice and a number of respondents were cognisant of the fact that school buildings in the area were underutilised outside of school hours, especially in the evenings.

Analysis

This section reveals the single biggest motivation for residents as vocational (53 percent). This is perhaps unsurprising given that certified education does increase a person's chances of 'decent work' and how embedded, and indeed beneficial, education for employability is in all realms of education. Other, often overlapping motivations were to improve confidence and skills for life (48 percent), to get out of the house and meet people (34 percent), for fun (31 percent), to improve literacy including IT literacy (22 percent), as an access pathway to college (14 percent) and finally to improve English fluency (10 percent).

However, both structural and interpersonal barriers persist that often prevent people getting involved. Care loads are the biggest impediment (40 percent) as well as the demands of work (33 percent) and financial restrictions (24 percent). Some people referenced cramped living conditions making it difficult to create study space. These structural barriers can often feel overwhelming in terms of what providers can do. However, community educators and other stakeholders can open debates about the impacts of economic inequality in determining equality in education. In a recent commentary on social class and education, Kathleen Lynch highlights 'Ireland's 'pay-as-you-go' system of supposedly free, but actually unfree, education' because of ancillary costs and suggests 'as insiders, teachers and lecturers need to challenge these at every turn'.[10] This same logic should be adopted within community and voluntary sector spaces. One place to start might be to highlight tensions where there are limits to the programmes an ETB can fund because of the employment contracts of tutors who are often precariously employed themselves but who, with the supprot of the trade union movement, can lobby for better terms and conditions of their own employment.[11]

Some strucutral barriers can be addressed. For example, where migrants are excluded because of a national failure to adequately recognise previous qualifications, some work has been done through a practitioner led *Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) National Network* which is working towards providing a coherent practitioner voice in informing policy in this regard including supporting good practice informed by national and international policy perspectives. It is important that providers in the NEIC are engaged in these spaces.

4.4 The Potential to Reach More

Perhaps the biggest barrier to participation is whether or not people are aware of the courses that are on offer. We sought to ascertain this by asking people directly from which the following emerged:

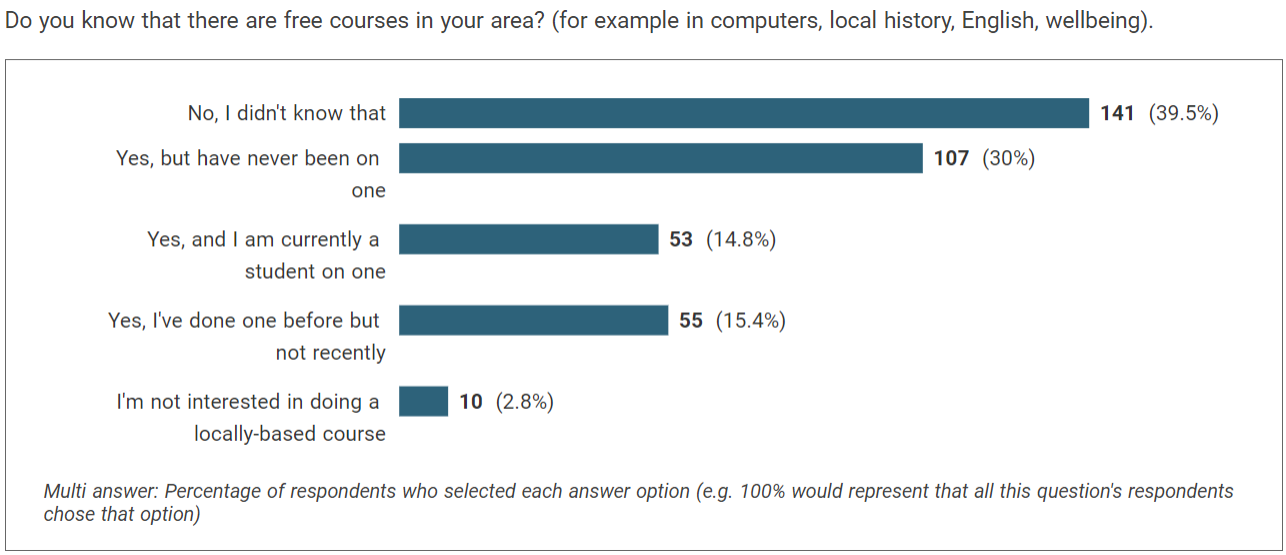


Figure 8 - Resident's knowledge of local community education[12]

Across each phase of the research there was a shared sense that more could be done to advertise programmes. Residents made concrete suggestions including more advertising on the radio, greater use of social media and websites and a more structured strategy to encourage recruitment through word-of-mouth. A number of people felt that programmes weren't advertised well. Survey comments included 'people either don't know or its not explained the right way' and 'need more advertisements on these courses, as not too many people are aware'. There was also a sense that people didn't understand that many courses are free of charge. One participant, who did know about local course explained:

> I didn't realise how many amazing courses are being provided in the north inner city. I found out through my job at the time. I really think you should advertise it more to let people know as there are some really beneficial courses being ran and people probably don't realise it. Thank you, I enjoyed filling out this survey 😊

Providers also made some clear suggestions for change in this area including an advertising campaign to raise awareness, a national campaign on community education more broadly and community cafes outside of centres. There is also a sense that advertising the work is often not straightforward. For example:

> Promotion is really important and it's a hard message to get across. Ok you're coming for the literacy but this could change your life…that is a hard message to get across to those with poor literacy.

This nuance is part of the reason why, for providers, one clear recommendation is for greater outreach supports. This is raised in every focus group and in the majority of one-to-one interviews. This isn't a straightforward proposal, and an exchange within a focus group, captures wider sentiment about the importance of 'outreach' being deeply embedded across the services and circumstances of a person's life.

> The processes are long and complex and relate to all aspects of a person's life … education is okay yeah but 'I have my housing issue and nobody's helping me with that'. Having that kind of communication where that person [the outreach worker] is able to ring whoever is supposed to deal with that. And they can say, 'Oh, actually, I am working on that already'. This sense of connection across providers is crucial to the model of outreach that providers espouse.

4.4.1 Creating an agreed understanding of community education.

For some providers, an agreed understanding of adult and community education is presented as one way to widen participation. In particular, a number of contributors felt that CDETB could more openly embrace a community development model (see section 2.1.1). There was a sense, as captured by one provider, of:

> A rather simplistic view of disadvantage that tends to be a bit one dimensional, that sees education as just a way for people to get a job and sure that's all that's required. So it has a very narrow perspective in a policy perspective and is very unhelpful to those of us who are dealing day to day with people who have a lot of issues.

Another provider believes there is scope to make positive changes within the policy context described in chapter 2. They share, 'we need to look innovatively at community education and the SOLAS brief now and come up with quite imaginative initiatives and I think it's a huge opportunity- to reach the disengaged'.

Key to this is the availability of unrestricted funding that would allow projects to respond to, as this provider puts it, 'what's happening on the ground and that we need to respond to quickly'. This same provider would like the opportunity to be experimental, something often impossible because of the strict parameters of current funding arrangements that link funding

to learner numbers. This can understandably create a culture where providers promote services within their own centre rather than refer people to another provider.

Analysis

It is significant that many residents are unaware of much local provision. Even when people knew about courses, some were unsure how to get involved and were unaware of the extent of evening delivery. This gap in knowledge is despite the significant efforts made by organisations to let the community know about the courses that they offer through a range of methods including outreach, leafleting and poster campaigns, radio and social media advertising. However, providers do acknowledge the need to do more, particularly in relating to a potential digital divide. There is also a clear appetite amongst providers to be clearer in their messaging and united in their communications with local residents.

One finding from the research is how staff and volunteers are clearly dedicated to the community and committed to working collaboratively and supportively. However, there are limits to what they can do in order for all residents of the NEIC to be supported in a way that respects their choices and takes into account their wider context. Another clear finding is a commitment to outreach and there are a variety of ways to do 'outreach' that include greater collaboration across providers but also knocking on people's doors, targeted digital outreach, and/or community events. Typically outreach work seeks to inform, consult and involve members of a community, be this a geographical, issue based or identity based community. Specifically, outreach seeks to achieve the following aims:

- To get accurate information to residents on existing supports and services.
- To consult with people in order to assess their needs and/or evaluate existing services.
- As a goal in its own right, for example as mental health outreach and literacy outreach.

Effective outreach not only supports a person in making informed decisions, it can adopt 'connector model' that doesn't view a person's educational needs in isolation but embeds these within the context of a person's life. The valuable knowledge generated through outreach work is cost-saving in its own right. It reduces duplication and improves outputs and can be invaluable in advancing the wellbeing of residents, increasing the numbers accessing local education and accelerating a person's capacity to find progression pathways which will now be discussed.

4.5 Progression Pathways

A not insignificant 14 percent of residents who completed our questionnaire identified the potential to progress from local education into college-life as a motivating factor. There is also policy support for dedicated access pathways for those graduating with QQI awards into university structures. The FET Strategy *Future FET Transforming Learning 2020-2024* (section 2.2.2) cites significant work in coordinating a consistent approach from Further Education and Training (which includes community education) to Higher Education and highlights how university students who transition in this way tend to prosper. There are some clear examples, from current learners, of progression mostly into Further Education. This participant shares:

> I completed a recovery programme in the north east inner city. Whilst I was on the course, I enrolled in a FETAC Level 5 course in [names another part of Dublin]. I subsequently progressed onto a Level 7 Diploma in Community Drugs and Alcohol Work in [names university]. Following this, I then progressed onto a Level 8 Honours degree in Social Policy and Sociology. I am currently doing a Professional Masters in Social Work in [names university].

A number of other focus group participants also talked about seemingly smooth progression into other courses once they signed up for their first course. A sense, as this person puts it, that the experience 'spurred me on to do more', in her case a degree. There are also incidences where people share the value they now place in education and how they have progressed in their life journey more broadly. A second respondent from this same group explains how her own experience of education has led to a secondary progression for her children:

> They always went to school and each of them went on to get scholarships for a private school which they attended; they themselves have come on so much; my oldest two graduating and my eldest son going on to study Business Management and getting his Bachelor's Degree.

4.5.1 Coordinating progression pathways

These testimonies evidence informal supports across local providers, Further Education Colleges and Higher Education Institutions. In particular, local providers have forged strong working relationships with staff within Marino College of FE, the Trinity Access Programme and within the National College of Ireland (NCI). However, there is a sense that more work

can be done in this space. One college provider would welcome a clearer and unified communication pathway and cited the ACE Forum (see section 3.12) as an obvious route. They explain:

> Is there something, I suppose to engage with the people that are sending the students to us, is there something we could do to support their integration, is there some way we could support them, is there something we could do differently? … I mean we do some visits to groups, but we don't do many which is very strange … maybe that's more about the courses that we offer?

Their questions reveal scope for dialogue across education providers.

There is also a sense that some changes are needed within Further Education to make it more inviting. For example, one provider comments on the terminology used nationally when naming major QQI awards which are given the title 'Post-Leaving Cert'. This, they rightly point out 'is exclusionary and people think it is not for them'.

Where people want to progress their careers, locally delivered vocational programmes in healthcare and special needs training are a popular option. Some relationships with employers have been forged, in particular by the National College of Ireland and Further Education Colleges that offer apprenticeship programmes. However, there is scope to improve formal pathways into employment.

Analysis

There are clear progression pathways into Further and Higher Education and a willingness from all involved to support learners who wish to continue their studies. It must also be noted that not everyone wants to progress; rather the significant benefits outlined in section 4.1 are sufficient. Moreover, the hidden cost of education can influence a person's capacity to engage in education beyond what is available locally. Research elsewhere has determined that even where government grants for college attendance are available, the additional burden of going to college such as transport, food and books can make it impossible to attend.[13] However, there is scope to explore progression pathways beyond what the Mulvey report identifies as 'small scale and niche'.

4.6 Conclusion

The research corroborates other studies that agree the benefits of community education are best articulated qualitatively and a case should be made for the retention of this model as sufficient for state funding. Many barriers and challenges cannot be eliminated by community and voluntary sector organisations or dedicated people within ETBs but rather rely on fundamental structural change. However, educators can make a contribution through emancipatory practices that highlight the shortfalls in traditional education and can enable adult learners to 'read the world' so they can participate in changing it.

Chapter 5 offers a strategy for realising this including how greater local collaboration can achieve specific goals.

[1] Bailey, Breen, & Ward, 2010.
[2] Ibid; Power, Neville, & O' Dwyer, 2011.
[3] Russell , Frances, Quinn, & King O'Riain, 2000.
[4] Power, Neville, & O' Dwyer, 2011.
[5] SOLAS, 2020, p. 45.
[6] Dooley, 2021, p. 64.
[7] Ibid., p. 5.
8 One Family, 2018.
[9] Eurodyce , 2019.
[10] Lynch, 2022, p. 38.
[11] Fitzsimons, Henry, & O'Neill, 2021.
[12] Six respondents were unaware of programmes and also answered that they were not interested in attending.
[13] Baker & Lynch, 2006.

Chapter 5. A Strategy for Future Work

5.1 Introduction

Traditional education, for example what happens in schools and colleges, is typically well understood by the population at large. Its outputs are readily identifiable and there has been significant progress in improving access and retention to Higher Education for non-traditional college goers. Despite this progress, the role the education system in totality plays in maintaining and perpetuating inequality is less understood. As Kathleen Lynch explains:

> While inequalities outside of education impact on those within, the internal life of education is not neutral in class terms. Education, or more accurately, the formal education system, is intimately bound up with the reproduction of the class structures of our society […] What has happened is that schools have managed to convince those who are relatively unsuccessful in formal educational terms (such as those in low reading groups, streams or bands, or those doing foundation or ordinary level subjects) that they owe their lowly educational and occupational status 'to their lack of gifts or merit', their lack of so-called intelligence.[1]

The adult and community education described in this study stems from a rich historical context that recognises the education system's role in perpetuating inequality and that promotes an alternative 'Freirean' approach that seeks to liberate rather than domesticate. By its very nature, this alternative model is more difficult to map. This explains some common misconceptions about duplication that often fails to recognise subtle but important differences across providers and the communities they engage with be these geographical, identity or issues based. Where there is duplication, this can be because of external forces, in particular where only certain specialisms are supported by Education and Training Boards (ETBs) because of the skills base on contracted tutors, or where the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP) referrals seek particular vocationally led options.

This strategy aims to support a greater understanding between funders and providers enabling all stakeholders to collaboratively iron out such concerns. A strategy for future development must balance funder-led and community-led aspirations and must be cognisant of the consciousness-raising ambitions of adult and community education as it responds to the complex needs of targeted residents in the NEIC. Education can increase people's awareness of climate-change, global inequality, the impact of borders on people's lives and the structural discrimination marginalised groups experience. This perspective can be in opposition to

government discourse and a policy context that is, in the main, driven by European-led employability demands.

5.2 Building on *"From Patchwork to Network"*

The Adult and Community Education (ACE) Forum is a significant outcome of the *From Patchwork to Network* action research initiative of 2016-2017. Many groups combined their efforts in a collective manner to create a network infrastructure where providers can share past experiences in order to hold the rich history of community education into the future. The Forum is a space where successful and unsuccessful initiatives can be drawn from and where a coherent voice can contribute to the regeneration of the North East Inner City. However, the work that has been done so far was only made possible because the implementation of research recommendations was financially resourced from within the City of Dublin Education and Training Board (CDETB).

The next stage in ensuring an ongoing strategic approach is financial investment in sustaining and growing the existing structures. Figure 9 illustrates this point.

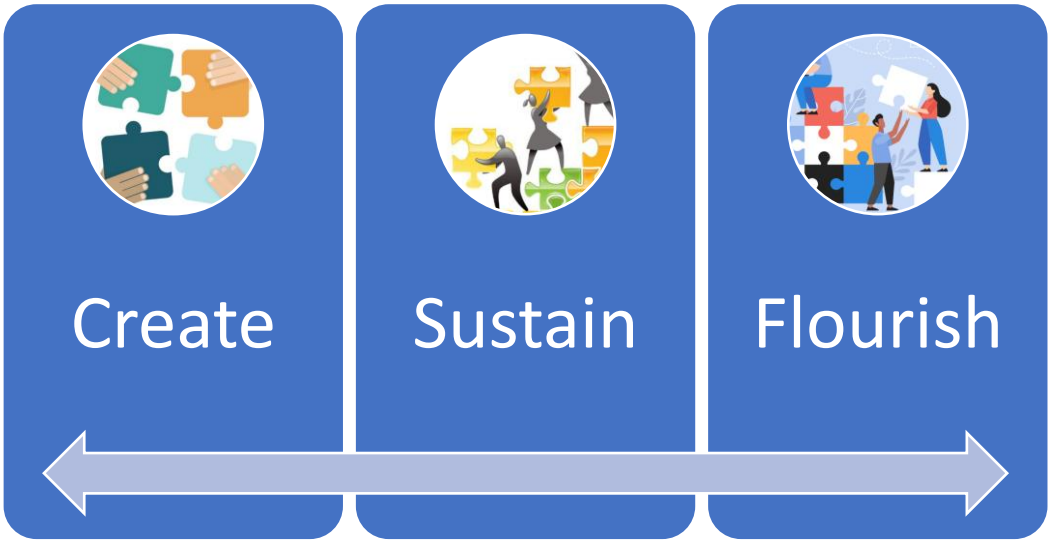


Figure 9 - Create, Sustain and Flourish

The success of a strategy relies on financial and resource commitment by the City of Dublin Education and Training Board to sustain the ACE Forum so that, in the future, it can flourish.

5.3 Five Goals for the Future

The proposed strategy for future development therefore relies on financial and resource commitment by the City of Dublin Education and Training Board. A resource person's role, (which may be part of a broader role) is to implement the following five goals:

GOAL 1: Expand the delivery of coordinated, community based education and guidance that supports personal, collective and civic need

GOAL 2: Develop a shared vision, values and core principles of Community Education as a tool to initiate policy change

GOAL 3: Advocate for social change in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals

GOAL 4: Raise awareness of provision and pathways amongst residents in the NEIC

GOAL 5: Raise the capacity of the Adult and Community Education Sector.

[1] Lynch, 2022, p. 34

GOAL 1: Expand the delivery of coordinated, community based education and guidance that supports personal, collective and civic need

Aim: With the support of a dedicated resource worker, ensure collaborative delivery of life-long, meaningful, accessible education by, in the first instance, strengthening and expanding the existing Adult and Community Education (ACE) Forum.

Strategies:

1. Collaboratively plan a facilitated meeting of regular attendees of the ACE Forum to re-familiarise members with the existing terms of reference and functions.
2. Expand Forum membership to all providers and stakeholders regardless of their funding stream and consider including learner and tutor representatives.
3. Re-launch the ACE Forum with an emphasis on its working-group structure that creates time-limited sub-groups as pertinent to the needs of residents and unfolding social contexts (for example, in response to an aging population, changing employment demographics, climate justice, gender-based violence etc.).
4. Develop a regular communications platform (e.g., quarterly newsletter or email communication) that informs forum members of changing policy developments with an emphasis on the NEIC strategic plan.
5. Carry out regular needs-analysis evaluations through existing providers to identify both gaps, and duplications in provision.

Anticipated Outcomes:

1. A more collaborative approach to enhanced delivery of a needs-based suite of supports both in terms of geographical need and/or identity/issue-based need.
2. A maximisation of resources.
3. A strengthening of existing relationships with all education providers in the area including schools and tertiary providers.

GOAL 2: Develop a shared vision, values and core principles of Community Education as a tool to initiate policy change.

Aim: To ensure all local providers are united when articulating the purpose of community education. This voice should be coherent for learners, funders and policy makers alike and should seek to influence policy and practice with key stakeholders and funders.

Strategies:

1. Create a time-limited working group from within the ACE Forum to review research findings from this consultation process. This should be facilitated by a dedicated resource worker from within the CDETB.
2. Facilitate a themed meeting of the newly expanded ACE Forum to present the research findings and examine existing models of community education such as the ETBI definition of community education (section 1.3.1) or the Community Education Charter as designed in collaboration with practitioners nationwide (appendix 6).
3. Agree on, and articulate a shared NEIC vision of adult and community education and seek endorsement by local providers.
4. Meet with key stakeholders within the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP) and with other stakeholders, for example, the Healthy Communities Project to articulate this vision and discuss challenges with current referral pathways with a view to a shared understanding of best practice.
5. With the support of other national networks (i.e., AONTAS CEN and CEFA), articulate and communicate the onerous nature of administrative demands to funders.
6. Communicate a shared vision for adult and community education to the NEIC taskforce through existing community representation within governance structures. * the two reps on the NEIC Sub Group 2 were not nominated by the NEIC ACE Forum but rather by the North Inner City Community Coalition Adult Education Working Group.

Anticipated Outcomes:

1. A shared vision for community education that is congruent with the collective, social change ambitions of the sector.

2. Strengthened capacity to coherently engage in government and governance structures as a united, values-based voice that can highlight administrative burdens and ineffective referral pathways.

GOAL 3: Advocate for social change in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals

Aim: To collectively advocate for a model of community education that understands intersectionality, aids humanitarian awareness and recognises the importance of sustainable development.

Strategies:

1. Organise a themed meeting of the ACE Forum to educate members about the SOLAS commitments to the UN Sustainable Development Goals. This could be done with the assistance of the Saolta initiative.
2. Actively engage with Coalition 2030 (an alliance of over 60 civil society organisations) that works to ensure Ireland adheres to its promise to achieve the SDGs.
3. With the support of these national initiatives (Saolta and Coalition 2030) develop a toolkit for local providers to audit their own work through the lens of the SDGs. This should include anti-racism initiatives and an audit of best practice in the universal design of learning.
4. Actively network with national and international platforms that advocate structural changes particularly in the area of housing, health, education, transport and welfare.
5. Actively link with the AONTAS Community Education Network in emphasising the importance of non-accredited educational pathways in building political capacity, encouraging people to vote, addressing global concerns including climate change, adopting strategies to address gender-based violence and addressing a range of other social concerns.

Anticipated Outcomes:

1. Greater awareness amongst providers of the nature of sustainable development.
2. Improved practices through the local implementation of bespoke audit tools.
3. Support from the community and voluntary sector on key campaigns for housing rights, protections of base standards of living, migrant rights, anti-racism work, climate justice and other economic and social emergencies.

GOAL 4: Raise awareness of provision and pathways amongst residents in the NEIC

Aim: To ensure the maximum number of adults have access to appropriate guidance and both accredited and non-accredited education at each stage of their learning journey with a particular emphasis on those from targeted communities.

Strategies:

1. Plan and coordinate an annual, shared recruitment drive to raise awareness amongst those not familiar with what is already present in the area.
2. Through the ACE Forum, develop a statement of outreach that identifies its three goals as to inform, consult and engage.
3. Encourage all providers to develop promotional materials and supports in a range of languages. This could be coordinated through the ACE forum to reduce duplication.
4. Encourage all providers to invest in developing digital outputs for raising awareness (e.g., Instagram, Facebook, TikTok).
5. In collaboration with residents, audit the availability of childcare and other supports.
6. Positively exploit the commitment of Further Education colleges by formalising pathways to and through tertiary education.
7. In collaboration with tertiary providers, develop an annual information exchange with local employers in the NEIC and Dublin City Centre.
8. Seek representation on the new FE provider under development in Cathal Brugha Street (section 3.13).

9. Further strengthen apprenticeship pathways in collaboration with local tertiary education providers.

Anticipated Outcomes:

1. Greater visibility of programmes on offer and supports available.
2. Developed social media presence to educate in its own right and enhance learner engagement.
3. Dedicated supports within Further and Higher Education Colleges.
4. Greater awareness across local employers.
5. Improved outcomes for participants in community education.

GOAL 5: Raise the capacity of the Adult and Community Education Sector.

Aim: To develop and strengthen the core capacities of adult and community education providers.

Strategies:

1. Expressly include an educational/mentoring role in the work of the ACE Forum.
2. Circulate information on Continuous Professional Development (CPD) opportunities as provided by national network organisations for example the AONTAS CEN.
3. Provide representation via the ACE Forum at national advocacy and support structures such as the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) network.
4. Create a collaborative space for developing Quality Assurance policies and practices in line with QQI requirements. Again this could be with the support of AONTAS.
5. Source funding for CDP in digital media skills and other provider training as the need arises.
6. Create rotational spaces for Forum members to update the wider membership on trends, issues and policy developments specific to their expertise/specialism.

7. Develop an online digital platform for sharing ideas, updating work, collaborating on policy submissions and campaign work across providers.
8. Run an annual Forum event that reviews practice from the previous year to inform future planning, identifies trends and issues in the work and attracts new members.

Anticipated Outcomes:

1. Strengthened cross sectoral professional learning for staff and volunteers.
2. ACE Forum members will have a greater understanding of policy developments.
3. ACE Forum members will have access to CPD both locally sourced and nationally provided.
4. ACE Forum members will pool resources regarding Quality Assurance thereby reducing duplication in effort.

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Appendix 1 – UN Sustainable Development Goals

Appendix 2 – Survey Questionnaire sent to Residents

Are you over 18 and living in North East Inner City Dublin? If so we need your help.

We are researchers with Maynooth University and we've been asked to design a plan for adult education in the area. We think local people are the best people to ask so we are sending out this survey to as many people as we can. We realise the population of NEIC is diverse and many people have qualifications already, this survey is about courses that can be provided locally.

The survey has 8 questions, and it takes at most 5 minutes. We won't ask your name and you only must answer the questions you want to answer.

The research is being organised by some local community education providers called The Dublin Adult Learning Centre (DALC), Lourdes Youth and Community Service (LYCS), Larkin Unemployment Centre and the CDETB Adult Education Service.

Thanks in advance!

Camilla Fitzsimons, Tricia Doyle and Sinead Hyland

I am 18yrs or over and I live in the North East Inner City. I understand that my answers will be used in designing an education plan for this area.

Do you know that there are free courses in your area? (for example in computers, local history, English, wellbeing).

- ☐ No, I didn't know that
- ☐ Yes, but have never been on one
- ☐ Yes, and I am currently a student on one
- ☐ Yes, I've done one before but not recently
- ☐ I'm not interested in doing a locally-based course

Would you go to a free or low cost course for any of these reasons (answer as many as you want).

- ☐ I'd do a course to get a qualification so I can get a job or change my job
- ☐ I'd do a course to meet new people and get out of the house.
- ☐ I'd do a course to improve my confidence and skills for life
- ☐ I'd do a course that will help me to get into college
- ☐ I'd do a course to improve my reading, writing, maths and computer skills
- ☐ I'd do a course to improve my English
- ☐ I'd do a course for fun e.g. gardening, creative writing, dancing, woodwork,
- ☐ I'd do a course for a different reason, I'll explain myself below

a. if you answered 'I'd do a course for a different reason' you can write your answer below.

What are the things that would stop you doing a course? Tick as many answers as you want.

- ☐ I am too busy minding my kids and/or other people in my family
- ☐ I don't have the money for extras - childcare, books, lunches etc.
- ☐ I work full time so cannot go to a daytime course
- ☐ I don't have the confidence to sign up for a course
- ☐ I don't think my reading and writing is good enough
- ☐ I just don't know where to start in signing up
- ☐ Something else I will explain below

a. If you answered 'something else' you can explain here

Nearly there, we just need to ask you a bit about yourself

What age are you?

- ○ 18-30
- ○ 31-45
- ○ 46-60
- ○ Over 60yrs

What is your gender

- ○ Female
- ○ Male
- ○ Non-binary
- ○ Prefer not to say

Which of these statements best matches your situation

- ○ I was born and raised in the North Inner City
- ○ I was born and raised in another part of Ireland
- ○ I moved to Ireland from another country when I was 16+ and have lived here ever since
- ○ Something else, I will explain below

a. If you wrote something else, please explain that here

Finally, is there anything else that you would like to say about local community education in the North East Inner City of Dublin? For example is there any courses that you would be interested in that we haven't thought to ask about

Appendix 3 – National Literacy Strategy engagement strategy

1	2	3	4
A **major national campaign** around literacy awareness and the supports that are available to help people with literacy issues, using multiple media channels and reinforced by stakeholders at national, regional and local level.	A **one-stop-shop** to bring together all relevant information and advice on literacy, help in identifying the literacy needs and link to further resources that allow people to take the next step in accessing support and services. The NALA freephone service will also be expanded alongside this resource as a first port of call for advice.	**Online training modules** developed and made available to all working directly at local level, with people who may have unmet literacy needs, to help them identify needs and signpost people appropriately.	A full and comprehensive roll-out of a consistent **initial and ongoing assessment approach** to literacy and numeracy across ETBs and their education partners.
5	**6**	**7**	**8**
Explore and progress steps required to ensure that communications from public organisations are delivered using **plain language.**	Commitment to new, long-term funding **to mitigate educational disadvantage,** drive community responses to improve literacy, meet the needs of specific target groups and support access to technology and devices.	A new initiative to **expand literacy support in the workplace** and a full roll-out of integrated literacy support across all FET provision.	Implementation of the new **Universal Design for Learning** guidelines and use of the UDL resource toolkit across all literacy provision.
9	**10**	**11**	**12**
Immediate expansion of flexible and intensive literacy provision, including further **development of standalone adult numeracy modules** in accessible formats and with flexible levels of support; more **intensive English language support** for migrants; and more tailored projects **targeting unmet literacy needs of priority target groups.**	**Simplification** of all informal and accredited, private and public, onsite and online digital skills opportunities by listing them all in one place in the one-stop-shop, and **expanding investment in digital skills provision** across formal and non-formal routes.	The development and establishment of an overall **continuous development framework for literacy practitioners,** embedding a consistent approach to initial and ongoing skills development.	Establishment of a **core skills framework** that allows learners to understand the skills they need and learning paths available.
13			
Building Healthy Ireland resources into overall literacy support and growing family literacy and learning approaches as part of a targeted **programme of support for health, social care and family support interventions.**			

Source: SOLAS, 2021, p. 13

Appendix 4 – Current Programmes on Offer in the NEIC

List of **Accredited** Courses in the NEIC by Subject

Level 2	
Communications	AES Parnell
Communications	Drugs Treatment Court
Reading & Writing	PALC
Computers	AES Parnell
Maths	AES Parnell
Maths	Drugs Treatment Court
Personal Development	Drugs Treatment Court
ESOL Reading & Writing	PALC
Level 3	
Communications	AES Parnell
Communications	Drugs Treatment Court
Communications & IT	PALC
Computer Literacy	DALC
Computers	AES Parnell
Computers	Drugs Treatment Court
Word Processing	DALC
Digital Media	DALC
Internet Skills	DALC
ESOL & Internet Skills	PALC
ESOL	O'Connell Secondary School
Application of Number	DALC
Mathematics	DALC
Personal & Interpersonal Skills	DALC
Level 4	
Communications	DALC
ECDL	CASPR
ECDL & QQI Preparation	Ozanam House
ESOL	PALC
ESOL	SIPTU Basic English Scheme
ESOL	PALC
Horticulture	Larkin Centre for the Unemployed
Maths for Apprenticeships	DALC
Retail Skills	DALC
Shaping Futures	INOU
Social Studies	Foundations Homelessness
Level 5	
Community Development	AES Parnell

Early Childhood Care &Ed	CASPR
Early Years Care & Education	Larkin Centre for the Unemployed
Healthcare Support (Major Award)	DALC
Special Needs Assisting	DALC
Social Studies	Foundations Homelessness
Level 6	
Early Years Care & Education	Larkin Centre for the Unemployed

List of **Non Accredited** Courses in the NEIC by Subject

Literacy/Digital Literacy/Numeracy	
1 or 2 Day Basic Reading & Writing Programme	DALC
Decoding Dyslexia	AES Parnell
ITABE English	AES Parnell
Listening & Speaking	AES Parnell
Literacy	AES Parnell
Literacy	City Clinic
Literacy 1-1	AES Parnell
Literacy 1-1	AES Parnell
Literacy support	Marino College
IT/PIPS	NWICTDP
Basic Computers	AES Parnell
Basic Computers & Internet	Ozanam House
Computer Literacy	LYCS
Computer Skill	LYCS
Everyday Computers	AES Parnell
Internet & Email	Foundations Homelessness
Internet Skills	Clonliffe & Croke Park
Intro to Computers	Larkin Centre for the Unemployed
Maths	SAOL
Basic Numeracy	DALC
ITABE Computers	AES Parnell
ITABE Maths	AES Parnell
English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)	
Basic English Key Skills	SIPTU Basic English Scheme
Beginners ESOL	SIPTU Basic English Scheme
Beginners ESOL	O'Connell Secondary School
Beginners ESOL	HACE
Beginners ESOL	PALC
Beginners ESOL	Pavee Point
Beginners ESOL	Ozanam House

Conversation (Informal)	Hill St FRC
Elementary ESOL	SIPTU Basic English Scheme
English Conversation	SIPTU Basic English Scheme
ESOL	SIPTU Basic English Scheme
ESOL	DALC
ESOL (CDETB)	Hill St FRC
ESOL Beginners	Foundations Homelessness
ESOL Conversation	Hill St FRC
ESOL Improvers	Foundations Homelessness
ESOL Support	Marino College
ESOL Unaccredited	PALC
ESOL Upper Intermediate	SIPTU Basic English Scheme
Literacy One to One	SIPTU Basic English Scheme
Mixed Level ESOL	SIPTU Basic English Scheme
Pre Intermediate ESOL	SIPTU Basic English Scheme
Survival English	St Lawrence O'Toole
Survival English	St Mary's National School
Survival English	PALC
Language/Culture/Drama/Art	
Art	Drugs Treatment Court
Art	Clonliffe & Croke Park
Art	LYCS
Art	SAOL
Art	Macro Snug
Art	Shine (HSE referral necessary)
Art	Ozanam House
Art & Craft	Gardiner St School
Art & Craft	Lourdes Day Care Centre
Choir	LYCS
Choir	Ozanam House
Creative Writing	SAOL Project
Creative Writing	The Basin Club
Creative Writing	SHINE
Digital Photography	Foundations Homelessness
Drama	SAOL Project
Guitar	LYCS
Guitar	Ozanam House
Line Dancing	Ozanam House
Painting	North Wall CDP
Pottery	LYCS
Pottery	Nascadh

Stained Glass	LYCS
Health & Wellness	
Creative Mindfulness	Hill St FRC
Health & Fitness	Drugs Treatment Court
Health & Fitness	Foundations Homelessness
Health Management	Shine (HSE referral necessary)
Men's Health & Wellbeing	Larkin Centre for the Unemployed
Mental Health Wellbeing	SAOL Project
Mindfulness	LYCS
Mindfulness	Marino College
Mindfulness	Mount Carmel
Mindfulness	Ozanam House
Peer Health Navigator	SAOL Project
Personal Care	Clonliffe & Croke Park
Positive Mental Health	Hill St FRC
Pre-College Programme	AES Parnell
Recovery Through Yoga	SAOL Project
Stress Management	Shine (HSE referral necessary)
Tai Chi	AES Parnell
Tai Chi	LYCS
Taking Control	Shine (HSE referral necessary)
Well -Being	LYCS
Well Recovery Action Plan	Shine (HSE referral necessary)
Wellness	Outhouse
Yoga	AES Parnell
Yoga	Ozanam House
Life Skills	
Cookery	LYCS
Brio	SAOL Project
Communications	SAOL
Community Participation	SAOL
Cookery	LYCS
Cookery	Mount Carmel
Cookery	St Vincent's Girl
Cookery	St Gabriel's Primary
Cookery	St Lawrence O'Toole
Dressmaking	Ozanam House
Gardening	North Wall CDP
Gardening	St. Lawrence O'Toole
General Cooking	Ozanam House
Horticulture Taster	Larkin Centre for the Unemployed

Knitting Group	LYCS
Music	LYCS
Parenting	Foundations Homelessness
Parenting	Hill St FRC
Sewing	LYCS
Simple Cooking	Ozanam House
Career Development	
Advanced Computers	Larkin Centre for the Unemployed
Career Skills Workshops	DALC
Core Skills	North Wall CDP
Intermediate Computers	Larkin Centre for the Unemployed
Intro to APPS Development	Ozanam House
Intro to Website Building	Ozanam House
Self-Employment Training	Larkin Centre for the Unemployed
Social Studies/Law/Advocacy	
Classical Studies	AES Parnell
Development Education	LYCS
History	AES Parnell
Intro to Psychology	Ozanam House
Intro to Social Science	Ozanam House
Philosophy	AES Parnell
Positive Psychology	Foundations Homelessness

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Appendix 5 - Resident Suggestions for Programmes

Literacy/Digital Literacy/ Numeracy	• Literacy and computer courses are essential for people in the NEIC area. • I think there is a requirement for more computer skills courses for everyone from school age to OAP. As the world we live in now relies on technology for everything • I would like to learn computer lessons. Thanks • Mainly my reading and writing - it takes time • Help people with their reading & writing; also if they are dyslexsic; I can't spell words and it's too hard to fill forms but this was not too hard for me to do 😀 • Advanced computer courses with practical labs • Maths at junior level • Computers
Health/Wellness	• I am interested in yoga courses or gym at a low price • More yoga classes. • Maybe Pilates • Would love to do yoga, mindfulness, exercise, cooking, well-being classes. Louise Hayes course. • I'd love to do a holistic training course in my area • Nail courses or dog grooming • I think that there's a general apathy regarding courses and self-improvement. Girls might be interested in makeup and grooming but other than that I think that you have a great variety of options available. • Food and nutrition and personal trainer for living a healthy lifestyle • Mental health education • Barber course • Makeup and nails • Personal development • What about Health Assistant QQI 5 courses? • Health and beauty although we're getting old so nice to keep ourselves looking good and feeling better about ourselves • I would be interested in doing a barber course and practicing up on my computers
Life Skills	• Home care courses. e.g. decor • Cooking and helping my mental health • Cooking and health courses • Driving tests • More budgeting courses - it helps families cooking on a budget • People need to go back to basics - budgeting and family meals on a budget • Guitar lessons. Singing. Personal care. Sewing and dressmaking. I think young people would be really interested in these types of courses. Not a lot for early school leavers to do. Be good to get them some kind of skill they'd have for life. • Training courses for parenting • Mindfulness • Cycling bike course • Courses teaching people to use common sense • Swimming, lifeguard • I would be interested in more services & support groups for children with additional needs

Career Development	• I would like to learn more about tax / how to write a CV / self-confidence / interview • Is there a courses like receptionist or something? • How to start your own business course • First steps to start your own business. How to develop an idea into a business • With all the construction going on in the area, why are there no courses in some basic things like Safe Pass, first aid, manual handling. Unless people have these it is very difficult to get in the door for even apprenticeships set up by the companies. All of the above courses are expensive especially a Safe Pass which has doubled in price to €200 in some cases due to the pandemic
Languages/Culture/Drama Art	• Irish politics for non-Irish people. Foreign Language (French, Spanish, German, etc.) • English courses at intermediate level. • I would like to start an English language course because my language is weak • This program is so good to help people of different nationalities to have a good education • I have taken part in a lot of courses but the one course I'd love to learn is sign language. • I think the people in the north inner city are very talented but just don't get the opportunity to show that off so I think an acting/drama course would be great for people to gain confidence and then maybe they could use it as a stepping stone to go out further into that particular industry • I've done 3 courses through the Larkin Centre but before that I never knew it existed. It was word of mouth. I'm interested in doing courses that would help me as a youth justice worker. I also like the psychology side of things. • Looking for a free English course in the morning • Irish for conversation • Singing and dance classes I would like very much • Art and crafts • Art
Social Studies/Law/Advocacy	• Community mentoring would help people • Addiction studies social studies. For social inequality etc. • Possibly around barriers that are facing people from NEIC, addiction, poverty, dyslexia, learning difficulties • Law. Social studies. • Psychology • History classes

Table 1 - Residents suggestions for programmes

Appendix 6 - The Community Education Charter

In 2021, a national Charter for Community Education was launched. This work was the culmination of consultation with two networks; The AONTAS Community Education Network (CEN), a network of over 100 community education providers which was established in 2007 and The Community Education Facilitator's Association (CEFA) which was established in 2004 to provide a sustained, collective voice for CEFs in order to support each other, share best practice and seek to influence government policy.