

**THE DEVELOPMENT AND STATE OF THE ART OF ADULT LEARNING  
AND EDUCATION (ALE)**

**National report of Ireland**

**by**

**the Department of Education and Science, Ireland**

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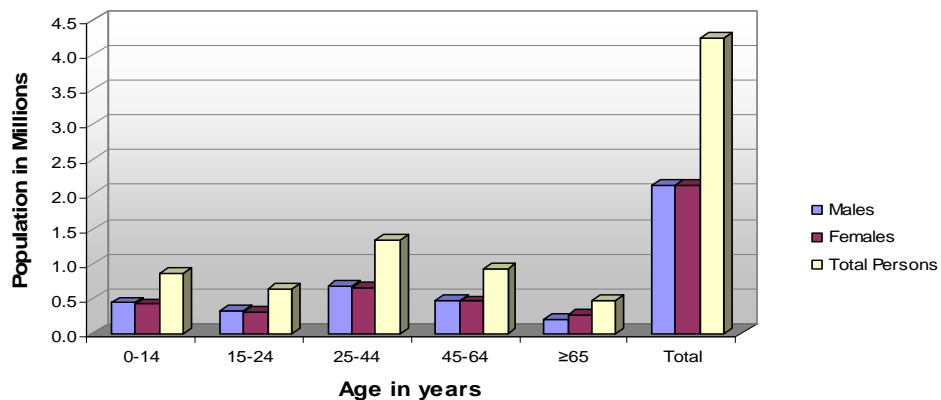
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## I. General Overview

The Republic of Ireland is an island off the North West Coast of Europe, with an area of c. 87,000 km<sup>2</sup>. The island of Ireland comprises of 32 administrative areas termed counties. The Republic of Ireland encompasses 26 counties; the remaining 6, “Northern Ireland” are part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Of the 5 cities in the Republic, the administrative and political capital, Dublin is the largest with a population in the greater Dublin area of 1.7 million people indicating that 40% of the total population lives within commuting distance of the Capital City.

Figure i.i Population of Ireland, Census 2006<sup>1</sup>



The population in Ireland increased by 17.2% to almost 4.34 million persons in the period 1998-2007<sup>2</sup>. This was the highest rate of increase in the EU 27. The rate of natural increase of the population in Ireland was 8.7 per 1,000 in 2006 compared to an EU 27 average of just 1.1<sup>2</sup>. In 2006, 12% of the population were non-Irish Nationals as follows:-

United Kingdom – the largest non-Irish group. There were over 112,000 UK nationals living in Ireland. They have been resident here for longer than other groups, with large numbers having been here since the 1970s and 1980s, and the majority taking up residence in Ireland during the 1990s.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.cso.ie/statistics/popofeachprovcountycity2006.htm>

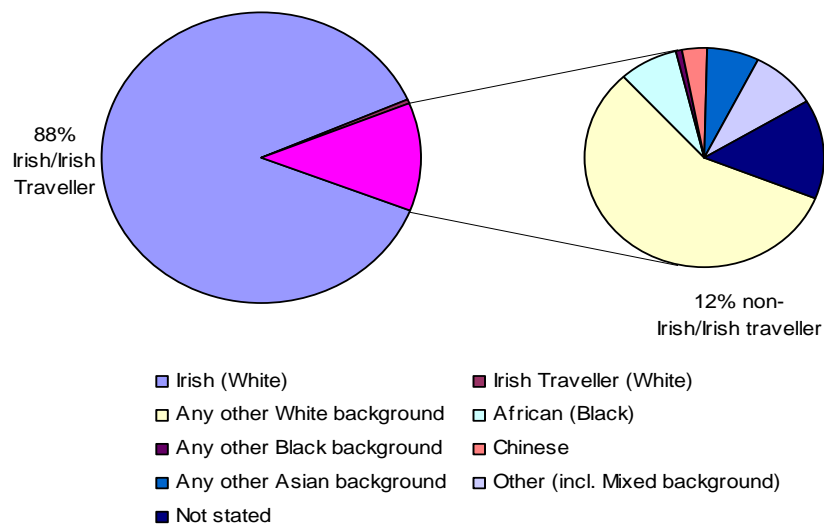
<sup>2</sup> Measuring Irelands Progress, Central Statistics Office, Stationary Office Dublin, 2007

EU 15 (excluding Ireland and UK) – people from the 15 states comprising the EU before May 2004. A majority of migrants from these states arrived during the period 2001–2006, but a substantial number have been living in Ireland since the 1990s. The EU 15 (excluding Ireland and UK) group comprises Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and Sweden.

EU15 to EU25 Accession States – this group saw the largest growth between 2002 and 2006, reflecting the accession of these states to the EU in 2004. Over 44 per cent of the citizens of these countries arrived in Ireland in 2005 or later. The states in this group are Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia.

Rest of World – The remaining nationalities comprise a varied group, but mainly composed of the USA, African and Asian nationalities.

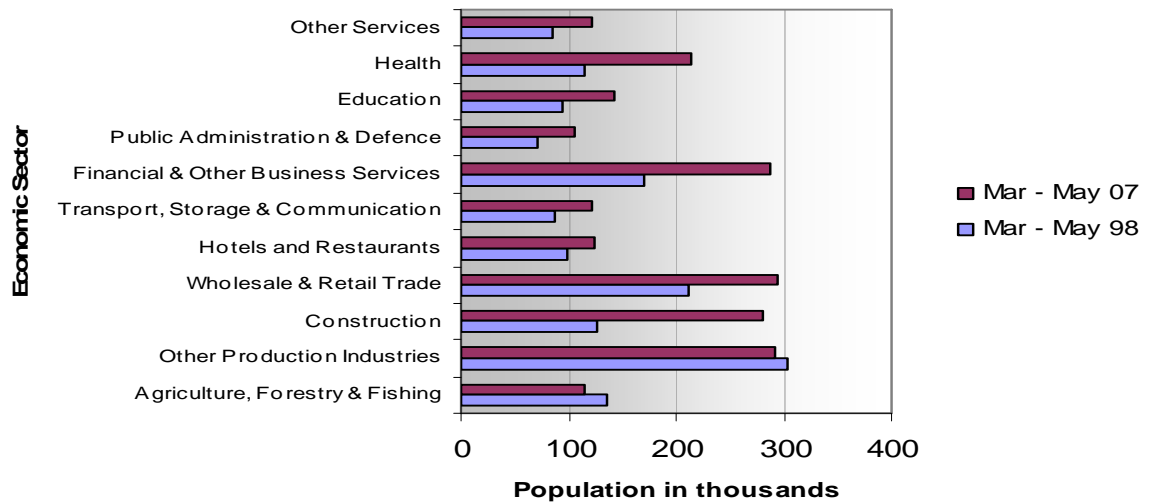
Figure i.ii Population by Ethnic Group, Census 2006



The Gross National Product of the country in 2007 was €161.2 billion or €38,025 per capita. In 2007, the total number of people in the workforce was just over 2 million, up from 1.5 million in 1998. Ireland's recent economic boom has been aided greatly by foreign direct investment and an influx of multinational firms utilising the highly skilled workforce and attractive corporate tax rate.

The employment rate in Ireland rose from 59.7% in 1998 to 69% in 2007. The rate for women increased by over 12 percentage points over that period, while the rate for men rose by over 6 percentage points. In 2006, Ireland had the eighth highest employment rate in the EU 27.

Figure i.iii Employment by Sector, 1998/2007



## **II. Irish Education System: Policy, Practice, Access**

### **The Irish Education System**

Under Article 42 of the Irish constitution (1937), the family is acknowledged as the primary and natural educator of the child. The State, however, as guardian of the common good requires that children receive a certain minimum education, including free primary education and other educational supports. Please see the appendix attached.

Schooling is compulsory for all children from ages 6 to 16. Over 85% of students go on to complete upper second level education or equivalent and over 55% of students progress directly to third level education.

### **First Level – Primary Education**

There are over 450,000 children in first level education. Most children start school between 4.5 and 6 years. The national curriculum, revised in 1999, is designed to nurture the child in all dimensions of life and reflects the educational, cultural social and economic aspirations and concerns of Irish society. Most children complete primary education by age 12 or 13.

### **Second Level – Secondary Education**

The second-level education sector in Ireland comprises secondary, vocational, community and comprehensive schools. There are over 340,000 students at second-level. The types of schools mainly differ on the basis of administration and sources of funding.

- Secondary Schools, which comprise the majority of second-level schools in Ireland, are privately owned and managed, many by religious orders or organisations
- Vocational Schools are administered by Vocational Education Committees
- Community and Comprehensive Schools which are administered by the state and owned by partnership boards of trust.

Second level education aims to build on the foundation provided at the primary level and seeks to provide a comprehensive and high quality learning environment which enables all students to live full lives, appropriate to their stage of development, and to realise their potential as individuals and citizens. Second-level education generally starts at age twelve and consists of a three-year junior cycle followed

by an optional *transition year* and a two-year senior cycle. The Junior Certificate Examination is taken at the end of the junior cycle, when most children are aged 15-16 years. The *transition year* provides an opportunity for students to experience a wide range of educational inputs, life skills and work experience at a remove from the examination focus. The core subjects taken throughout the six years are English, Irish and Mathematics. Students can then choose their other subjects from a broad range including arts, languages, sciences, technical and applied subjects (e.g. technical drawing, woodwork etc.). Students entering the system after 11 years of age are not obliged to take Irish Language examinations. At the end of the senior cycle the Leaving Certificate Examination is taken. Students normally sit for this examination at 17 or 18 years of age.

Three Leaving Certificate programmes are available:

1. The Leaving Certificate (established)
2. The Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP)
3. The Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA)

### **The Leaving Certificate**

The long established, traditional Leaving Certificate examination is the terminal examination of post-primary education and is taken when students are typically 17 or 18 years of age. Syllabi are available in 34 subjects. All subjects are offered at two levels, ordinary and higher. Irish and Mathematics are also available at foundation level. "Students following the established Leaving Certificate Programme are required to study at least five subjects, one of which must be Irish".

In 2006, over 51,000 students took the Leaving Certificate Examination. The Leaving Certificate is the main basis upon which places in universities, institutes of technology and colleges of education are allocated.

The last number of years have been characterised by a programme of revision and updating of syllabi for individual subjects. A key objective of such revision is to ensure that the broad range of abilities, interests, learning styles and special needs of students are well catered for.



### **The Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme**

The Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) was introduced in 1989 and modifies the traditional Leaving Certificate Programme, with a concentration on technical subjects and some additional modules which have a vocational focus. Due to its high vocational content, it attracts funding from the European Social Fund. In 1994, it was expanded to broaden the choice of subjects and to strengthen the vocational content of the programme by including three Link Modules – Enterprise Education, Preparation for Work and Work Experience.

Students opting for the LCVP must take:

- five Leaving Certificate subjects, including two subjects from a specified set of vocational subjects
- a recognised course in a modern European language
- three mandatory Link Modules.

### **The Leaving Certificate Applied Programme**

The Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) Programme was introduced in 1995 and is a self-contained two-year course. It is a person-centred course involving a cross-curricular approach rather than a subject based structure. It has as its primary objective the preparation of participants for adult and working life through relevant learning experiences, which develop the following areas of human endeavour: spiritual, intellectual, social, emotional, aesthetic and physical. The framework of the LCA Programme consists of a number of modules grouped under three general headings:

1. General Education
2. Vocational Education
3. Vocational Preparation

The LCA Programme is intended to meet the needs of those students who are not adequately catered for by other Leaving Certificate Programmes. Although certification in the LCA is not recognised for direct entry to third level courses, students who successfully complete the programme can proceed to Post-Leaving Certificate courses and thereby continue their education.

### **Third Level / Higher Education**

The higher education system in Ireland is broad in scope and encompasses the university sector, the institutes of technology, the colleges of education and private, independent colleges. The institutions

which fall within the first three groupings are autonomous and self-governing, but substantially state funded. The numbers in higher education in Ireland have increased significantly in recent decades with over 55 percent of students who complete second level now going on to higher education. Entry to third level education for Irish students is highly competitive and based upon performance in the final secondary school examination, the Leaving Certificate (see above). Application is made through the Central Applications Office (CAO). The Universities and Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) awards qualifications and sets and monitors standards at all levels of higher education and training up to doctoral level. All Irish awards are included in the National Framework of Qualifications. Widening participation in higher education is a key policy goal in Ireland. The Department of Education and Science (DES) provides financial assistance to students from disadvantaged background to access higher education and in addition, under-graduate students benefit from free tuition. In 2007, 41.3% of the population aged 25-34 had third level education<sup>3</sup>.

### **Adult / Further Education**

The philosophy of Adult/Further Education in Ireland is to provide a range of education programmes for young people and adults who have either left school early or who need further vocational education and training to enhance their employment prospects and to enable them to progress their education up to a standard equivalent to upper secondary level.

The White Paper on Adult Education “Learning for Life” (2000) and the Report of the Taskforce on Lifelong Learning” (2002) are key reference points for the development of further education and adult learning provision. The social partnership agreement, “Towards 2016”, the National Development Plan 2007-2013 and the National Action Plan for Social inclusion 2007-2016 also highlight priority areas which are being targeted by the Government.

The principal objectives of the measures and programmes funded by the Department of Education and Science in the area of further and adult education are:

- To meet the needs of young early school-leavers;
- To provide second-chance education for people who did not complete upper secondary education; and
- To provide vocational preparation and training for labour market entrants and re-entrants.

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<sup>3</sup> Measuring Irelands Progress, Central Statistics Office, Stationary Office Dublin, 2007

The main providers of these services are the Vocational Education Committees (VECs).

Full-time programmes include

- Youthreach, which is a programme for early school leavers aged 15 – 20 years;
- Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) for adults who are over 21 years and are unemployed;
- Senior Traveller Training Centres – mostly for members of the Traveller community who are over 15 years (10% of the cohort are from the settled community); and
- Post Leaving Certificate Courses which offer students accreditation at National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) levels 5 and 6.

Part-time provision includes

- community education, particularly for adults who are hard to reach and are accessing non-formal education as a first return step on the lifelong learning ladder
- literacy and numeracy for adults with specific needs in this area, including catering for the English language needs of migrants who wish to learn the language or improve their proficiency in English;
- The Back to Education Initiative (BTEI), enables adults to access part-time education options. This initiative is particularly suitable for adults who are re-entrants on the lifelong learning ladder or have other commitments that do not allow them to partake in full time education. BTEI is free to students with less than upper second level education.
- Self-financed ALE, usually through evening classes. These classes may be held in public or private colleges and training establishments.

Support services include the Adult Education Guidance Initiative and the provision of childcare support for participants on Youthreach, Traveller Training, VTOS and BTEI.

Certification is usually in alignment with the National Framework of Qualifications, an awards framework of 10 levels which is aligned to the European Framework of Qualifications. Two national awarding bodies differentiate between further education and higher education; The Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) awards certification at levels 1 to 6 and The Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) awards certification at levels 6 to 10.

Policy issues are addressed in consultation with relevant stakeholders. Support services are funded by the Department of Education and Science and delivered by the VECs, the Further Education Support

Service (FESS), by agencies under the aegis of the Department, such as the National Centre for Guidance in Education or through voluntary bodies funded by the Department of Education and Science, such as the National Association for Adult Education (AONTAS) and the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA).

The Department of Education and Science financial provision for Further and Adult Education in 2007 ran at €386.7 million. This encompasses funding for early school leavers and learners progressing directly from upper secondary to post-secondary provision in addition to adult learning.

Additional government funded sector specific training and ALE delivery is sourced from:-

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment - FÁS. The national training and employment authority offers a wide range of apprenticeships, training for the unemployed and training in the workplace. FÁS has 20 training centres, and also operates centres and programmes in partnership with Institutes of Technology.

The Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Food - Teagasc. Teagasc provides Further Education and training from 33 centres. The programmes cover all aspects of agriculture, including horticulture and food science, and are targeted to meet specific needs of farmers and the food industry, in addition to broader vocational certificate programmes. Teagasc also operate temporary centres, and programmes in partnership with Institutes of Technology.

The Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Food - Bord Iascaigh Mhara. This organisation operates three permanent centres and two mobile coastal training units. Programmes are provided in fisheries and encompass commercial fishing, aquaculture, communications and health and safety.

The Department of Arts, Sports and Tourism - Fáilte Ireland. Programmes are provided in the fields of hotel, catering and tourism and are a mix of theoretical and work based learning in four training centres. They include craft training, adult training and training tailored for enterprises. Fáilte Ireland also operates temporary centres and programmes in partnership with Institutes of Technology.

## **1. Policy, Legislation and Financing**

### **1.1. Legislative and policy frameworks of ALE**

Government policy for Adult Education in Ireland is set out in a document published in 2000 entitled "Learning For Life - White paper on Adult Education". Specifically, the document sets out a template for the development of the Adult Education Sector as part of an overall Government commitment to establishing a comprehensive system of lifelong learning for all. The White Paper:

- Reflects on the role of Adult Education in the context of an overall vision for the development of this society;
- Focuses in particular on the needs of learners;
- Sets out the Government priorities and the framework for the further development of the sector;
- Identifies the priorities for public investment, based on public consultation;
- Identifies priority groups and programme areas and set targets for implementation;
- Elaborates on the roles of various providers in the field and the supports they require;
- Provides for a learner centred framework incorporating infrastructural elements such as guidance and counselling, quality assurance and the training of trainers, and ensuring a coherent range of pathways for adults between education and training and other relevant supports;
- Proposes a comprehensive structural framework at national and local level for the support and development of Adult Education; and
- Sets adult education in the context of an overall continuum of quality education services from early childhood through to and throughout, adulthood, as an integral element of a framework for lifelong learning.

In addition to the White paper, several important pieces of legislation have been enacted which impact on the delivery of further education services in Ireland. Table 1.1 lists relevant legislation and associated implications.

Figure 1.1– Legislation & Policy Framework Governing Further and Adult Education in Ireland.

<b>Legislation</b>		
<b>Title</b>	<b>Year of Enactment</b>	<b>Implications</b>
The Universities Act	1997	Sets out the objectives of Universities, including “facilitate lifelong learning through the provision of adult and continuing education”
The Education Act	1998	Promotes equality of access and opportunities for adults who did not avail of education in schools
The National Qualifications (Education and Training) Act	1999	Provided a legislative footing for the establishment of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, Higher Education and Training Awards Council and the Further Education and Training Awards Council.
The Education Welfare Act	2000	Sets compulsory school attendance age at 6 -16years and accordingly, post-compulsory education commences on or after the individual reaching the age of 16
The Vocational Education ACT	1930	Gave responsibility to Vocational Educational Committee's for the provision of adult education.
<b>Policy Documents</b>		
<b>Title</b>	<b>Year of Publication</b>	<b>Implications</b>
White Paper on Adult Learning – ‘Learning for Life’	2000	Outlines structure and format of Adult Education and Training in Ireland
National Development Plan (2000-2006)	2000	Sets a plan for social, employment and infrastructural investment in the years 2000-2006 in order to promote sustainable national economic and employment growth .
Programme for Prosperity and Fairness (PPF)	2000	Continuing from <i>Partnership 2000, for Inclusion, Employment and Competitiveness</i> agreement between the Social Partners. The PPF outlined a continuing, agreed, framework for adult and lifelong learning.
Towards 2016 – Social Partnership Agreement (T2016)	2006	Social Partnership agreement continuing from PPF above. Commitment to adult and continuing education and training.
Tomorrow's Skills: Towards a National Strategy	2007	Sets targets for upskilling the workforce by 2020 including targets for adult and continuing education and training.

National Development Plan (2007-2013)	2007	Continuing from NDP 2000 - Sets a plan for social, employment and infrastructural investment in the years 2007-2013 in order to promote sustainable national economic and employment growth .
National Action Plan for Social Inclusion	2007	Sets a programme of targets and interventions for those who are socially excluded

As the national policy maker, the Department of Education and Science sets out strategic goals for the various Education services within its remit. As set out in the Department's strategy statement the following goals are applicable to Adult Education:

- Develop policy to support a framework for lifelong learning
- Support and promote the implementation of the National Adult Literacy Strategy
- Support Vocational Education Committees in the development and delivery of the vocational education and training to meet the needs of young school leavers and adults requiring second chance education and to address the skills needs of entrants and re-entrants to the labour market
- Support community education
- Promote access, quality and relevance in Further/Adult Education

#### 1.1.1. ALE Organisation

There are three layers to the provision of **publicly funded Adult Education** in Ireland. The Department of Education and Science is responsible for legislation and policy development. It also provides and monitors funding for the services in the area. The 33 geographically dispersed Vocational Education Committees are responsible for the planning and provision of adult education in relevant schools and public colleges within their geographical area. The final layer is the service providers or individual schools and colleges who are responsible for the actual delivery of the service to the learner.

**Vocational Training and employment** focused Adult Education is the responsibility of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, and, through it, An Foras Áiseanna Saothair (FÁS), the State training and employment agency. Through a regional network of 66 offices and 20 training centres, FÁS operates training and employment programmes;

provides a recruitment service to jobseekers and employers, an advisory service for industry, and supports community-based enterprises.

**Higher education institutions** run part-time and evening courses in order to aid in the provision of adult and continuing education at the upper levels of the National Framework of Qualifications. Figures from the Department of Education and Science indicate that the numbers of part-time students enrolled in higher education institutions has risen from 22,795 students in 1997 to 31,354 in 2006, an increase of almost 40% over the 9 years.

A significant number of private providers exist in the adult education network. Courses in this area may be unaccredited, accredited by national or international training awards councils or recognised by professional bodies in the state. Programmes are funded by the students. The numbers of adult learners in private institutions is unavailable.

#### 1.1.2. Policy Alignment

The development of policy in the Adult Education Section is performed through consultation with key stakeholders. Governmental Departments with interests in the area, such as the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the Department of Social & Family Affairs, are consulted with a view to formulating educational policy which is streamlined and focused on learner needs in the context of national policy measures. Relevant areas such as providing an educated, modern and adaptable labour force, creating an inclusive society and providing educational facilities to those who are accessing various welfare payments are key in these consultations. Non Governmental Organisations, including advocacy groups and trade unions are also consulted in this context.

#### 1.1.3. Challenges

The main challenges in the sector are to increase the education levels within socially disadvantaged areas and groups and to cater for the basic educational needs for the increasing number of non-english speaking migrant workers, programme and convention refugees. Social inclusion and anti-poverty strategies play a central role in setting achievable targets in this respect. There is also a need to improve the educational levels of



our workforce to meet the evolving nature of our economy from manufacturing to high skilled, high value added activities as outlined in the National Skills Strategy.

## **1.2. Financing of ALE**

Funding in the Education sector is provided through the exchequer by means of public funds (i.e. taxation). The Department of Education and Science receives an annual budget from the Department of Finance, the allocation of which is decided by the Minister for Education and Science. In 2008, funding of over €9.3 billion is available to the Education sector. Of this, approximately €182m is provided for Adult/Further Education. This equates to in the region of 1.96% of the overall allocation. This budget is allocated to the VECs to provide the various adult education schemes.

Adult Education Services are part funded through the European Social Fund. The European Social Fund (ESF) is one of the EU's Structural Funds, set up to reduce differences in prosperity and living standards across EU Member States and regions, and therefore promoting economic and social cohesion. The ESF is devoted to promoting employment in the EU. It helps Member States make Europe's workforce and companies better equipped to face new, global challenges.

There is a range of adult education provision provided by religious institutions, unions, NGOs and community groups. The education is provided for members and their families and the general public. The Department of Education and Science provides funding towards the activities of several of these bodies.

There is broad range of self-financing adult education available to learners provided by schools and private organisations mainly in the evening time. These are mainly short-term courses lasting 10-15 weeks duration. The fees charged are at the discretion of the provider.

### **1.2.1. Direct and indirect financial incentives to encourage learners to return to education.**

The Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) is a scheme for unemployed people, lone parents and people with disabilities who are getting certain payments from the Department of Social and Family Affairs. The allowance can be paid to people who wish to undertake approved second or third level courses of education. BTEA is not an unemployment payment. Participants get a standard rate of payment which is not means tested.

The Vocational Training Opportunity Scheme (VTOS) is a full-time second chance education and training initiative for unemployed people who are 21 years or over. The scheme is delivered and managed locally by the VECs and is offered to up to 5000 people per year. Courses between levels 3 and 6 on the National Qualifications Framework are offered to VTOS students. Tuition, stationery and books are provided free of charge. A childcare grant is also available to VTOS students and they can access the adult guidance service.

VTOS has proved very successful in opening up learning and progression opportunities for people who have been unemployed with 72% of students, who completed the two-year VTOS programme in summer 2007, moving into employment or further education courses.

Childcare support funds are provided by the Department of Education and Science to Vocational Education Committees in order to encourage parents to take part in Youthreach and Senior Traveller Training Centre programmes for early school leavers, the Vocational Training Opportunity Scheme for the unemployed and the Back to Education Initiative. The funds provide for:-

- Direct provision of crèche facilities in centres, or in rented premises, including staff, equipment/refurbishment, rental, insurance and other overheads.
- Purchase of places on existing community or commercial crèches.
- Payment of childminders.

## **2. Adult Learning and Education: Provision, Participation and Achievement**

### **2.1. Provision of ALE and institutional frameworks**

The Department of Education and Science has overall responsibility for the management of the Further Education Sector. There are 33 Vocational Education Committees around the country who are responsible for the delivery of services within their geographical area. The VECs national body, the Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA), is regularly consulted by the Department in the context of policy development.

Figure 2.1– ALE Programmes and Delivery.

Programme Name	Provided by			Area of Learning			Target Groups	Programme cost 2007	Funding Source
	State	NGO	Private	General Competencies	Technical skills	Knowledge Generation/ Innovation			
Adult Literacy	✓	✓		✓			Early School Leavers, Migrants, single parents, disadvantaged areas	€30m	Irish Exchequer and some European Social Funding
Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) commenced in October 2002 to provide an expansion of flexible part-time options across Further Education. The Back to Education Initiative comprises two strands - Formal Strand (VECs and Secondary, Special and Community and Comprehensive Schools Community Strand) - Community Strand (Community Groups and Organisations)				✓	✓		Priority is those adults with less than upper second level education. Lone parents, People with Disabilities, Homeless, People with basic educational needs, Ethnic minorities, Young offenders and those at risk of becoming young offenders, Travellers, Disadvantaged men and women, Long-term unemployed, Early school leavers, Older people	€18m	Irish Exchequer and some European Social Funding
Youthreach is an integrated programme of education, training and work experience. The Programme usually provides two years integrated education, training and work experience.	✓			✓	✓		Young people in the 15-20 age group who have left school early without any qualifications or vocational training	€65.5m	Irish Exchequer and some European Social Funding
Senior Traveller Training Centres	✓			✓			The target group is Travellers who have left school with either minimal or no qualifications, however, there is no upper age limit, and particular effort is made to encourage parents on to the programme, given the impact this can have on their children's subsequent participation in schooling	€26.2m	Irish Exchequer and some European Social Funding
Post Leaving Certificate Courses	✓			✓	✓		People who have completed senior cycle second level education (e.g. Leaving Certificate, Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme or Leaving Cert Applied) or a Vocational Preparation and Training Programme (VPT-1) or equivalent, and who need further education and training to enhance their chances of gaining employment.	€130m	Irish Exchequer
Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme	✓			✓			Over 21's in receipt of certain welfare payments	€68m	Irish Exchequer
Community Education	✓			✓			Older people, Single Parents, adults in disadvantaged areas, early school leavers	€10.4m	Irish Exchequer

### 2.1.1. Linkages between formal and non-formal approaches.

Community education refers to education and learning, generally outside the formal education sector, with the aims of enhancing learning, empowerment and contributing to civic society.

Community Education is funded by the Department of Education and Science through annual grants to Vocational Education Committees. In 2007, the Department provided community education grants of €10.1 million to the VECs. In 2008 this will increase to €10.4 million to support local community-based education groups outside the formal education sector. This is usually allocated through the provision of teaching hours, or small grants, to a range of community and voluntary groups for educational activities.

### 2.1.2. ALE certification and national awards.

The National Qualifications (Education & Training) Act 1999 provided the legislative footing for the establishment of the National Qualifications Authority, the Higher Education and Training Awards Council and the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC). The National Framework of Qualifications, the NFQ was proposed through the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999 and launched in 2003. It is a system of ten levels, aligned with the European Framework of Qualifications which incorporates awards made for all kinds of learning, wherever it is gained. School, further education (FETAC awards) and higher education (DIT, university and HETAC awards) are all included.

FETAC was established to make quality assured awards in accordance with the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). Each of the schemes mentioned at 2.1.2. can lead to certification at FETAC levels 1-6. Apart from these major qualifications, the NFQ also recognises smaller pieces of education and training through minor awards, supplemental awards and special purpose awards. The NFQ, through its ten levels, provides a means of comparing and contrasting national and international education and training qualifications. It helps learners to plan their education and training and employers to identify the qualifications they require.

Included in the awards structure is the provision for recognition of prior learning (RPL). Three purposes of RPL are set out in the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland's *Policies, Actions and Procedures for Access, Transfer and Progression* (October 2003) as being:

- entry to a programme leading to an award
- credit towards an award or exemption from some programme requirements
- eligibility for a full award

While RPL for access, credit/exemptions is generally practiced, the concept of making full awards on the basis of RPL is a relatively new one for Ireland the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999 sets out that learners may seek awards directly from HETAC or FETAC without having participated in specific programmes. A number of pilot projects in RPL have been undertaken recently, most notably by Fáilte Ireland for workers in the hospitality industry.

While certification and formal recognition of achievement is seen as one end point of ALE, recognition of non-formal ALE is also vital in an Irish context. Community Education programmes may not lead to a formal award, however the importance of these programmes both to the learner who may be venturing into education following an extended absence and to the community is recognised through a dedicated budget and the implementation of the actions outlined in the White Paper on Adult Education (2000) through the provision of a network of Community Education Facilitators in the VECs.

## 2.2. Participation in ALE

Figure 2.2.1 – Participation rates in Department of Education and Science funded ALE initiatives.

Programme	2006			2007		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Adult literacy	16,981	23,652	40,651	18,249	27,563	45,812
Back to Education Initiative	5,923	18,805	24,728	6,016	19,844	25,860
Post Leaving Certificate Courses	8,516	21,673	30,189	8,810	21,148	29,958
Senior Traveller Training Centres	153	901	1,054	161	928	1,089
Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme	1,741	3,636	5,377	1,787	3,616	5,403
Youthreach	1,426	1,437	2,863	1,556	1,577	3,133
Community Education			30,000			30,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>34,740</b>	<b>70,104</b>	<b>134,862</b>	<b>36,579</b>	<b>74,676</b>	<b>141,255</b>

### 2.2.1. Research on non-participation.

In 2000-2006 the Department of Education and Science (DES) funded the Education Equality Initiative (EEI) through the National Development Plan (2000-2006) with support from the European Social Fund. The aim of EEI was to support a range of action research projects to generate policy and practice lessons to address educational disadvantage. EEI confirmed that adult educational disadvantage is a multidimensional reality incorporating economic, social, cultural, psychological and educational elements and the result of a combination of factors working together to marginalise men and women and impede access to structured learning. These barriers may be: informational, provider-related, situational or dispositional.

EEI projects demonstrated that supporting participation requires the removal of these barriers and a focus on, for example, immediate housing, welfare, health, transport, child/elder care and/or learning support needs in tandem with learning needs. This suggests

agencies need to collaborate closely in the interests of their service users. Thus, the major policy lesson from EEI activities is that an integrated national and local approach is the only effective way to address educational disadvantage. Funding has been provided again for the EEI in the period 2007-2013.

The Office for Social Inclusion is the Government Office, based in the Department of Social & Family Affairs, with overall responsibility for co-ordinating and driving the Government's social inclusion agenda, which includes the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007 – 2016 (NAPinclusion) and the social inclusion elements of the National Social Partnership Agreement Towards 2016 and the National Development Plan 2007-2013. The Office co-ordinates the process across departments, agencies, regional and local government, and implements key support functions.

Groups that are specifically targeted by the OSI are lone parents, Travellers, long-term unemployed, homeless, migrants, ethnic minorities, older people and people with disabilities. These groups are targeted for assistance in a variety of sectors, such as health, housing, welfare and employment, and not just in the education sector. However, with regard to Further Education, many of these groups are targeted specifically by programmes such as the Back to Education Initiative, Youthreach, Senior Traveller Training Centres and literacy programmes.

#### 2.2.2. Mobilisation of learners.

A number of campaigns are targeted at increasing the awareness of adult and further education among the general public. AONTAS, the National Adult Learning Organisation, organises an annual Adult Learning Festival which aims to:

- Celebrate adult learning and the achievements of adult learners;
- Showcase the work of adult education providers;
- Promote the work of the adult education sector; and
- Ensure that adult education is recognised as playing a hugely important role in the economic and social future of Ireland.



The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) promotes adult literacy and basic education activities. This includes television advertising campaigns and programmes that are targeted at encouraging people to participate in adult literacy tuition. The programmes also involve follow up support for learners via the telephone and the Web. NALA also organize a National Adult Literacy Awareness Week annually to publicise the adult literacy services available nationwide.

In addition a number of support schemes aimed at encouraging people to take part in adult education have been introduced, namely the Adult Education Guidance Initiative (AEGI) and childcare grants aimed at encouraging and assisting young parents back into the education system. The AEGI provides a quality guidance service to people who are considering returning to the education system, and is available throughout the country.

#### 2.2.3. ALE target groups.

The primary groups targeted by Further Education programmes are those who have not had the opportunity to benefit fully from the formal education service, the aim being to provide these groups with a second chance to achieve a recognised qualification and to contribute in a meaningful way to the community and society in general. The groups targeted by each particular programme are set out in more detail in Figure 2.1 above.

#### 2.2.4. Benchmarks for participation

The Government of Ireland, through the National Development Plan, the National Skills Strategy and Social Partnership agreements sets targets for participation in education and training and upskilling of the workforce. The Social Partnership includes Government, unions, employers and community representatives. The Department of Education and Science regularly publishes targets for expanding on the levels of service available. These targets are set out in documents such as the Department's Annual Output Statement. These targets take into consideration the level of service and the resources available.

The Social Partnership Agreement "Towards 2016" set targets for expansion of the adult literacy service, Youthreach programme and the Back to Education Initiative between 2007 and 2009. The National Action Plan for Social Inclusion set a target for reducing the number

of people of working age with literacy difficulties levels by 2016. The adult literacy programme is co-funded by the EU. There are participation targets built into the funding provision on which progress is reported on bi-annually. The National Skills Strategy has set out an economic imperative for the upskilling of workers with low or no qualifications by setting targets for improving the levels of education currently in existence by 2020. The national skills strategy also made the recommendation that literacy and numeracy development should be embedded in all publicly funded education and training programmes.

### **2.3. Monitoring & evaluating programmes and assessing learning outcomes**

Benchmarks in relation to the outcomes of ALE are in place through the National Strategies as outlined in 2.2.5 above. Progression towards these targets is monitored on an ongoing basis and reviewed in accordance with new policy development.

Currently there is no specific Adult Learner Database in place in Ireland. Targets are monitored through local arrangements, through figures from the National Awards Councils and National Coordinators for the individual programmes.

Learning outcomes and learners achievements are measured in a number of ways. The National Framework of Qualifications provides an easily accessible standard of measurement of achievement for learners who chose to access awards. For those programmes where awards may not be appropriate programmes are monitored and reviews of programmes are undertaken. These reviews typically include feedback from co-ordinators, tutors and learners who are currently undertaking the programme.

### **2.4. Adult educators/facilitators' status and training**

There are no specific qualifications required for Adult Education tutors/teachers in Ireland. However, in general, the PLC, VTOS and STTC programmes are provided by qualified post-primary teachers the majority of whom hold full-time positions. A post-primary teacher in Ireland must hold a suitable degree and a suitable teacher-training qualification. A suitable degree is a degree or equivalent award from a State recognised university or similar third level college which is adequate to enable the holder to teach to the highest level (in the case of the majority of subjects, this is Leaving Certificate, higher level) at least one subject from the post-primary schools curriculum. The duration of such a degree programme must be at least three years of full-

time study or equivalent. A suitable teaching qualification is a teacher-training qualification directed towards the 12-18 age range from a State recognised university or similar third level college. The duration of such a programme must be at least one year of full-time study or equivalent. The most common teaching qualification is the Higher Diploma in Education which is awarded on successful completion of a one-year full-time course.

There were 3,599 volunteers providing adult literacy tuition in 2007, 70% of adult literacy tutors. Paid tutors are likely to hold a higher education qualification, including a specific adult literacy qualification. Community education tutors may or may not hold a higher education qualification – much will depend on the subject area.

Part-time self-financing evening classes are delivered by a range of staff including qualified post-primary teachers doing extra work, professionals who hold down day jobs in their professional area and a range of people with particular skills and experience in the subject area they are teaching such as crafts, personal development and hobby/ leisure activities.

In general the lack of a distinct ALE career structure with specific qualification requirements and the limited number of full-time positions is reflected in the status of ALE tutors/teachers throughout the country. The majority of entrant tutors/teachers are older than entrants to teaching in other sections of education and training and many find themselves teaching adults through chance rather than through any clear-cut decision to pursue a career as an adult educator.

In-service support and training is administered by the Department of Education and Science's Teacher Training Unit, the Further Education Support Service and a grant to the VECs is provided towards training in the specific programmes. In addition, support is provided through a number of professional and non-governmental organisations specialising in areas such as literacy and guidance etc.,

Qualifications requirements for appointment as adult education organisers, co-coordinators and managers employed by the VECs are growing. For example, the NALA/WIT Higher Certificate in Arts in Adult Education (NFQ Level 6) or equivalent qualification is part of the criteria for appointment as an Adult Literacy Organiser. Community Education Facilitators must have a qualification of at least national certificate standard in order to meet the recruitment criteria. Adult Education Officers are required to hold qualifications recognised for the purposes of appointment

as teachers in post-primary schools. Adult education guidance counsellors must undertake a one year full-time post-graduate programme in guidance and counseling.

As outlined above a number of third level institutions provide qualifications for adult literacy organisers and adult literacy tutors. The Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT) provides courses as part of the adult literacy accreditation project which has been in existence since 1996. The following programmes are currently delivered: Higher Certificate in Arts in Adult Education (NFQ Level 6), Bachelor of Arts (Ordinary) in Adult education (NFQ Level 7) and Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Adult Education (NFQ Level 8). A number of Higher Diploma and Postgraduate Diploma/Masters in Teaching & Learning in subjects such as Adult and Continuing Education and Further & Higher Education are also available

### **3. Research, Innovation, Good Practice and Mobilisation of Learners**

#### **3.1. Education Equality Initiative**

Since 2000, the Department of Education and Science (DES) has funded the Education Equality Initiative (EEI) through funding from the National Development Plan (2000-2006 and 2007-2013). The aim of EEI is to generate policy and practice lessons to address educational disadvantage. A total of 17 projects have been funded to date. EEI confirmed that adult educational disadvantage is a multidimensional reality for learners, incorporating economic, social, cultural, psychological and educational elements. It is the combination of factors working together that marginalise men and women and impede access to structured learning. These barriers may be informational, provider-related, situational or dispositional.

The major policy lesson from EEI activities is that an integrated national and local approach that is non-sectoral is the only effective way to address adult educational disadvantage. The life-cycle approach of *Towards 2016* and the National Development Plan 2007-2013 and the recent Programme for Government present opportunities to address the needs of educationally disadvantaged adults in a way that integrates income, social services, education and participation in society.

#### **3.2. Research Association in Adult and Community Education**

RAACE is a network for those engaged in or interested in research in the adult and community education fields in Ireland. This includes those working in adult basic education, vocational and community education, further education and higher education. The Development committee consists of representatives from Third Level institutions and learner and literacy representative organisations. The purpose of the organisation is to explore issues in adult and community education research; share knowledge, experiences and research resources; identify gaps in research knowledge and explore opportunities for co-coordinated research in these areas.

#### **3.3. Back to Education Initiative**

The Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) aims to increase the participation of young people and adults with less than upper secondary education in a range of flexible learning opportunities. The BTEI is intended to make further education provision more accessible generally. However, a priority is to target the individuals and groups that experience particular and acute barriers to

participation, and are more difficult to engage in the formal learning process. Programmes are typically part-time.

Best practice guidelines for Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) service providers are being produced for the increased participation of men in course provision. The guidelines will promote the inclusion of men, who traditionally are seen as hard-to-reach in relation to engagement with second chance education programmes. The development of guidelines has been informed by desk based research, interviews with the Adult Education Guidance Service and focus groups with formal and community strand providers of BTEI.

### **3.4. SkillIVEC**

The body responsible for publicly funded healthcare in Ireland and the largest public sector employer in Ireland<sup>4</sup>, the Health Services Executive (HSE), identified the skills that it deemed necessary for Support Staff and Supervisors through the SKILL (Securing Knowledge Intra Lifelong Learning) Project. Awards are available at NFQ level 5 and 6 for managers and support staff within the public hospital system. Learners with an identified literacy difficulty are supported through additional programmes at level 3 and 4 in order to prepare for entry onto the formal courses. Programmes are funded by the HSE and are delivered through the VEC network.

### **3.5. Award development at NFQ Levels 1 & 2**

The publication of the National Framework of Qualifications in 2002 enhanced transparency in relation to awards and progression opportunities for learners. Following publication of the framework, all available awards were migrated to the new framework and allocated to a level in accordance with pre determined criteria and required learning outcomes.

It was found that awards were unavailable at levels 1 and 2. Level 1 awards require the learner to demonstrate learning outcomes related to the performance of basic tasks in a controlled environment under supervision, the display of an ability to learn information and basic repetitive skills, as well as to sequence learning tasks. Level 2 key outcomes are basic literacy and numeracy and the introduction to systematic learning. Learning outcomes at this level are typically developmental.

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<sup>4</sup> 70,000 staff are directly employed by the HSE, a further 36,000 people are employed by voluntary hospitals and voluntary agencies which are funded by the HSE.

2007 saw the development of the first programmes leading to awards at level 1 & 2 of the NFQ. This allowed learners at lower literacy levels an opportunity to enter onto the NFQ and to gain formal recognition of their achievement. Level 1 and 2 certification is currently available in Communications and General Learning.

#### 4. Adult Literacy

The term “Literate” means the possession of reading and writing skills to meet the demands of daily life. In addition to reading and writing, the term now extends to such basic education as personal development, learning to learn and IT skills.

##### 4.1. New policy implementation in Literacy

The National Framework of Qualifications, launched in 2003, provides for a single coherent award system for all levels of education and training in the State, including awards for courses for adults returning to adult literacy and basic education provision, on a ten point scale. The first awards at Levels 1 and 2 were recently issued by FETAC after a pilot phase. The issue of adult literacy and basic skills is included in broader policy statements contained in the latest social partnership agreement (Towards 2016), the National Development Plan (2007-13) and social inclusion measures described in the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion (2007-13). The National Skills Strategy (2007) also sets out long-term objectives for up-skilling the adult population as a whole, as well as targeting policy intervention on low-skilled groups or groups at risk. It was also the subject of a dedicated report from the Oireachtas (Parliamentary) Joint Committee on Education and Science in May 2006. The National Skills Strategy makes the recommendation that literacy and numeracy development should be embedded in all publicly funded programmes, and sets out an economic imperative for the upskilling of workers with low or no qualifications.

##### 4.2. Literacy Programmes

**Intensive Tuition In Adult Basic Education (ITABE):** In 2006, an intensive tuition in adult basic education (ITABE) programme commenced within the VECs, in which six hours of literacy tuition is available per week instead of the usual two hours. In 2007 and 2008, additional funding of €1 million was provided for intensive literacy tuition which will lead to a doubling of the funding for intensive literacy tuition to €2 million. Accreditation available for this group would be mainly at FETAC levels 1-3.

**Family Literacy:** A family literacy initiative under DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) - An Action Plan in Educational Inclusion commenced with a pilot initiative in 2007. The initiative provides seed funding for the development of Family Literacy Projects in association with the VECs. Family learning is also provided as part of the regular adult literacy service.



**Literacy in the Media:** The Department of Education and Science and the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) have co-operated on a number of projects designed to promote Literacy through the medium of television. Two series - "READ WRITE NOW" and "The Really Useful Guide to Words and Numbers" were developed in the last number of years and were shown on the national television network. The series were designed to provide literacy tuition with the 2003 series of READ WRITE NOW attracting an average weekly audience of 146,000.

The 2008 series "Written off?" was designed to lessen the stigma surrounding Adult Literacy problems and followed the real life experiences of 11 adults on their journey through education courses leading to FETAC basic literacy qualifications.

**Initial Assessment for Adult Literacy Learners:** A project is under way to develop appropriate tool(s) for initial assessment and screening of adult literacy levels for use by further and adult education providers. There is currently no standard assessment tool to assess learners' literacy levels on entry into adult education. This project is being overseen by a committee consisting of members from the Department of Education and Science, the IVEA, FETAC and FÁS.

**Workplace basic education initiatives:** There are workplace basic education initiatives in both public sector and private companies.

**English Language provision:** (ESOL or English for Speakers of other Languages) is mainly made through the adult literacy service and other further education programmes. The service has expanded in recent years due to increased demand. The Department of Education and Science and the Reception and Integration Agency of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform have recently commissioned an independent review of provision, to assist in the development of a national English language training policy for legally resident adult immigrants in Ireland.

#### **4.3. Gender and Target Group Focus**

Adult literacy services are available to all adults who need them. Generally, the majority of participants in adult and further education programmes are female. In adult literacy the ratio is 60:40 between female and male participants. There are a number schemes targeted at people with special literacy needs, e.g. family literacy, deaf people, people with dyslexia and a literacy service in the Irish language for people in Gaeltacht (Irish-speaking) areas. Under the terms

attached to the literacy funding provided by the Department of Education and Science to the VECs, priority must be given to those most in need, in particular those possessing a literacy level at or below Levels 1 & 2 on the National Framework of Qualifications. VECs are encouraged to promote new approaches to basic literacy provision including:

- Family-based literacy programmes, targeting parents and their children;
- new outreach strategies;
- intensive literacy development;
- a small number of demonstration projects providing open-learning centres;
- distance-learning provision;
- literacy for such specific groups as Travellers, people with learning difficulties, those with disabilities, refugees and asylum seekers, family learning groups etc.;  
and
- themed literacy provision, e.g. literacy through computers.

#### **4.4. Policies and programmes aimed at building literate environments**

Adult literacy and basic education was identified as a priority area in Ireland with the publication of The White Paper on Adult Education (2000) by the Department of Education and Science and the Report of the Taskforce on Lifelong Learning (2002) by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. These policy initiatives were a direct response to the findings of the International Adult Literacy Survey, in which Ireland scored relatively poorly. The National Skills Strategy makes the recommendation that literacy and numeracy development should be embedded in all publicly funded programmes, and sets out an economic imperative for the upskilling of workers with low or no qualifications.

## **5. Expectations of CONFINTEA VI and future perspectives for ALE**

Attendance at CONFINTEA VI will reinforce the Irish Governments commitment to Adult Learning and Education in the coming years. Ireland has made a number of advances in this area and hopes to further progress Adult Learning at every level in the future. The development of a National Framework of Qualifications in 2003 and the provision of certification at all levels of the Framework in the past year have provided learners with a clear pathway for recognition of learning achievement. The appointment of a Minister of State with responsibility for Lifelong Learning in 2007, working across the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment allows for a cohesive approach to education and workplace and vocational training.

Ireland sees CONFINTEA VI as a valuable opportunity to share best practice and to help drive the development of Adult Education in Ireland. Currently in Ireland there are a number of challenges within publicly-funded ALE provision:-

- Current provision is programme-based and, while there is significant co-operation across the programme providers, the provision of an integrated service-based provision of publicly-funded ALE may be a factor that should be examined in relation to International best practice in the coming decade.
- There is a need to determine the most appropriate personnel for ALE provision and to develop a career structure for personnel employed in publicly-funded ALE provision based on initial professional development (IPD) and continuing professional development (CPD).
- Monitoring and evaluation of publicly-funded ALE should be examined in order to support evidence-based policy-making.